

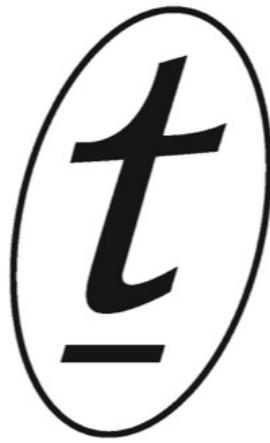
PETER COCHRANE

'Brilliant and provocative...Strips away the layers of myth.' Frank Bongiorno

BEST WE FORGET

THE WAR FOR
WHITE AUSTRALIA,
1914-18





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About the Book

‘Revelatory history at its best.’ STEPHEN FITZGERALD

IN THE HALF-CENTURY PRECEDING THE GREAT WAR there was a dramatic shift in the mindset of Australia’s political leaders, from a profound sense of safety in the empire’s embrace to a deep anxiety about abandonment by Britain.

Collective memory now recalls a rallying to the cause in 1914, a total identification with British interests and the need to defeat Germany. But there is an underside to this story: the belief that the newly federated nation’s security, and its race purity, must be bought with blood.

Before the war Commonwealth governments were concerned not with enemies in Europe but with perils in the Pacific. Fearful of an ‘awakening Asia’ and worried by opposition to the White Australia policy, they prepared for defence against Japan-only to find themselves fighting for the empire on the other side of the world. Prime Minister Billy Hughes spoke of this paradox in 1916, urging his countrymen: ‘I bid you go and fight for White Australia in France.’

In this vital and illuminating book, Peter Cochrane examines how the racial preoccupations that shaped Australia’s preparation for and commitment to the war have been lost to popular memory.

‘A great read...[It] will seep into the national consciousness.’ TIM WATTS

PETER COCHRANE
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FORGET**

THE WAR FOR WHITE
AUSTRALIA, 1914-18



TEXT PUBLISHING MELBOURNE AUSTRALIA

Contents

Cover Page

About the Book

Title Page

Introduction

1 A Racial Epic—The Anzac Legend

2 Space Invaders

3 The Declaration of White Australia

4 The Sentinel

5 The Perfect Storm

6 The Fate of the Peruvians

7 ‘Willy Nilly’

8 ‘No White Man Worthy of the Name’

9 War and Peace

10 Versailles

11 The Politics of Popular Memory, or, The Art of National Forgetting

Notes

Select Bibliography

Acknowledgments

About the Author

Praise for *Best We Forget*

Copyright page

In memory of
John Hirst

‘In human affairs there is never a single narrative. There is always one counter-story, and usually several, and in a democracy you will probably get to hear them.’

INGA CLENDINNEN

‘The History Question: Who Owns the Past?’

Quarterly Essay 23, 2006

Introduction

‘I bid you go and fight for White Australia in France.’ Billy Hughes, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 October 1916

For much of the nineteenth century, white Australians were untroubled by the outside world. Asia was considered too poor and backward, or too downtrodden, to threaten the Australian land mass. And Europe was thought to be too far away to visit its dismal ructions on the colonies. Isolation was insulation.

That benign situation did not endure. From the 1870s onwards, the strategic setting deteriorated, the outside world seemed to crowd in and white Australians felt ever more vulnerable to threats from abroad. Political leaders in the Australian colonies were disturbed by the gathering tensions in international relations: the arms race in Europe; the scramble for colonies; the Russian navy in the North Pacific; and the movement of Germany and France into the South Pacific, into New Guinea and the New Hebrides respectively.

An ‘awakening Asia’ was also a source of burgeoning anxiety. Concerns over Chinese migration, the threat to jobs, to culture and racial purity, reached a pitch in the last quarter of the nineteenth century; while the rise of Britain’s protégé, Japan, its navy cruising the Pacific in the 1890s, was viewed as a troubling development for the security of the Australian land mass.

Worst of all, the experience in these decades proved, incontrovertibly to some, that Britain could not be relied upon—that London’s priorities were elsewhere, the British navy stretched thin, and Australia could well be alone come the day of reckoning. In this context, in the old century and the new,

were planted the seeds of the young nation's wholesale commitment to the anticipated world war.

Across the half-century preceding the war of 1914–18 the transition was dramatic: shifting from complacency to alarmism, from a profound sense of security in the embrace of empire and the protective reach of the Royal Navy to a deep anxiety about the possibility of abandonment, even betrayal, should the day of reckoning arrive.

Collective memory may now recall a spontaneous rallying to the British cause in 1914, the assumption of near total identification with British interests and the good, strategic reasons why Australians did not want Germany to defeat Britain and thus 'destroy the fabric of the Empire upon which we rest', as Prime Minister Billy Hughes put it.

But history, meaning some of the best scholarship in the field, suggests an underside to this story—a long and tortuous lead-up; an agonising recognition on the part of Australia's leaders that security, and most importantly race purity, must be bought with Australian blood; and a concern, not with enemies in Europe or the Middle East, but with imminent or latent perils in the Pacific, meaning Japan.

Thus, for almost a decade prior to 1914, a succession of Commonwealth governments directed their energies to preparing for defence against Japan, only to find themselves fighting for the empire in Turkey, Palestine, France and Belgium. In the midst of the war Billy Hughes spoke plainly of this paradox: 'I bid you go and fight for White Australia in France,' he told the men of Australia in 1916.

Why have the racial preoccupations that shaped Australia's preparation for and subsequent commitment to war been lost to memory? Why has the obsession with the Pacific and race purity, with Japan in particular—an obsession stretching from colonial times to the Paris Peace Conference of 1919–20 and beyond—escaped recall? Why has the racial dimension of the strategic thinking of Australia's leaders been lost to posterity? Why does our collective remembrance contain not the faintest notion that the nation's war was, in no small part, a war for white Australia? In chapters to follow I spell out the racial context, and the racial dimensions of the war itself, concluding with a chapter on the politics of popular memory: how and why the substantial literature on this subject has been shunned.

A Racial Epic—The Anzac Legend

‘This is the last land open to the white man—the only one that can be purely British.’

C. E. W. Bean, 1907

Every generation moulds the Anzac Legend according to its own ideals, and thus moves further away from the original, further away from the understandings that the legend embodied in its first iteration, the ideals it endorsed and the values it represented.

The legend we know today is nothing like the one that evolved in the First World War and the 1920s.

In its formative years, and for years thereafter, the Anzac Legend was a rite-of-passage story about the foundation of a nation. It was also a celebration of Australia’s part in the war in terms of a racial triumph, a triumph which affirmed the qualities of Anglo-Saxondom, of the British race and what C. J. Dennis called ‘the Southern breed’—the offshoot of the British race that occupied Australia.

We see this racial essence in the thinking and writing of C. E. W. (Charles) Bean, the man who did more than any other to establish the legend. The beginnings of the national story that Bean would shape in his wartime journalism, and subsequently his *Official History* of the war and other books, can be found in his pre-war writings. He had the template long before a shot was fired. This is not mysterious, for the racial legend that he

and others moulded was the pinnacle of half a century of meditations on race and anxious musings on the struggle for racial survival.

Seeds of a Legend

In his pre-war journalism for the *Sydney Morning Herald*, and in several books, Bean's focus on national character is clearly evident, as is his belief that national character in the colonies was evolving a superior being, an improved strain of the British bloodline. The true 'Australian native', he wrote, 'is not a black man...[nor] an Englishman' but a new man 'hammered out of the old stock'. Bean described this new man as a 'tall, spare man, clean and wiry rather than muscular', and in his face he saw 'a certain refined, ascetic strength'.¹

That word 'clean' would recur again and again, a pointer to the obsession with racial purity that had inspired the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901, better known as the White Australia policy. Bean noted the Australian type was distinguished by the Anglo-Saxon qualities of 'personal cleanliness' and a 'love of truth', but he thought these qualities were more pronounced in the Australian, the southern branch of the race. He wrote of the 'indescribable frankness by which you can pick out an Anglo-Saxon face from a crowd of foreigners; and the cleanness which is no mere lick and a promise'.² It was a cleanness that went deep, a cleanness he believed was 'in the blood'.

This superior strain of British man had evolved from the battle with the Australian bush—with 'droughts, fire, unbroken horses, cattle; and not infrequently strong men'—the result a superior being, physically and mentally, and most importantly a superior fighting man:

An Australian will not pocket an insult. Where an Italian or a Spaniard would knife you, an Australian will fight you... All this fighting with men and with nature, fierce as any warfare, has made of the Australian as fine a fighting man as exists. He would be the best soldier, too, were it not for the lack of just one quality which is necessary to turn the fighting man into the soldier...Beyond a doubt it is difficult for him to obey any order, especially one of which he does not at the time see the precise expediency.³

So, discipline was a problem, but not if the officer was the right type, 'a man in every sense of the word'. Bean believed the Australian had all the qualities necessary for military greatness: 'If the right and reason of going to be killed is clear to him, he will be killed cheerfully and with a very

pretty courage, and will do a deal more damage before he is killed,' he wrote. Here, in words penned and published in 1907, were the seeds of the Anzac Legend, all the qualities that Bean, as war correspondent and historian, would celebrate in his writings on the war. The essential ingredients were all present long before Gallipoli and the Western Front. Even mateship fitted into his frame: mateship, according to Bean, was probably an article of faith with all Anglo-Saxons, but among the men of the Australian outback it was a sacred creed.⁴

That year, 1907, Bean also wrote for the *Spectator* magazine in London a piece supporting the White Australia policy. He took a familiar line, citing the outnumbered-ness of white Australians—just three million whites in a continent of three million square miles and a mere one day's voyage from eight hundred million Asians. In defence of the policy, he argued a European and an 'Oriental' race could not live together to the benefit of either: 'The Western demoralizes the Eastern,' he wrote, 'and vice versa.' He worried that an oriental invasion was inevitable, and he declared his fear that Britain might not come to Australia's defence in the hour of need. He beseeched the Mother Country to promise she would not leave Australians to fight the battle of their race alone.

Bean was deeply troubled by Britain's alliance with Japan, now the pre-eminent naval power in the Pacific. He believed, correctly, that the British government was 'out of sympathy' with Australia's commitment to race purity and with the reality of Australia's geography—a sparsely populated continent, far from Europe, next door to Asia. He did not trust the Japanese. He had followed closely the Russo-Japanese war of 1904–05 and his thinking echoed a widespread sentiment in Australia: a rising fear of Japan in the wake of Russia's defeat. The racial framework of his thinking is set out in his *Spectator* essay:

Australians [would] not live as a white race over the head of a subject people, even if they could do so. Their ideal is to keep Australia, if possible, a land where their children can live the healthy Western life of their British fathers. That ideal you must allow them. This is the last land open to the white man—the only one that can be purely British. South Africa cannot be a white man's land, simply because you cannot spirit away millions of blacks. The United States—even our magnificent Canada—will be less purely Anglo-Saxon as time goes on. Australia, of all countries in the world, is an ideal one for the white man to live in. That is what a White Australia means to Australia and to England.⁵

As we shall see, this idea of Australia as an Anglo-Saxon citadel, the last bastion of the purest and finest white blood, entirely 'clean', shaped defence

thinking in Australia from the late colonial period onwards, in company with the fear that Australia might be left to fight an Asian invader alone. More importantly, this fear was the strategic concern *behind* Australia's commitment to the First World War. The primary objective, of course, was the defeat of Germany, the survival of Britain and the empire, and the maintenance of those strategic, economic and sentimental ties that most Australians cherished. But most Australians also cherished their racial purity and that too was at stake, or so it seemed in the years before the war and during the war itself. Charles Bean's writing is a touchstone for this anxiety.

In 1908, he was assigned to the British flagship HMS *Powerful* to report on the American fleet visiting New Zealand and Australia. He reacted to the visit with a passion that makes bizarre reading a century later. He described one battleship as 'a great grey warhorse, brave and big and fast, and full of the gentleness of all big things', its smoke 'as black and soft as the coat of a Persian kitten'. And he noted how, in his view, the eyes of one American sailor 'grew very soft as he slapped one fat barrel on the *Louisiana*...[and] fondled that cold steel contour as you might a woolly lamb'.⁶

Bean was one of many Australians who responded to the American fleet—dubbed the Great White Fleet—with a surfeit of emotion. By 1908 Australia's sense of cultural as well as strategic isolation was troubling the foremost political men in the land. The British navy was no longer supreme, as it had once been, and now Japan, a great Asian power, had emerged in the North Pacific. With the arrival of the American fleet, Australians were at least momentarily in touch with the might of their Anglo-Saxon inheritance, albeit at one remove. The tour, as the historian Neville Meaney notes, 'released a flood of feeling and gave rise to a plethora of verse and doggerel'. Even Bean was moved to verse, the defiant tone as clear as the racial sentiment:

For one staunch mother bore them
Of one staunch Northern race
To find the world before them
And look it in the face.⁷

Bean would have endorsed a poem by the radical poet Bernard O'Dowd, who somehow managed to combine an uncommon opposition to the White

Australia policy with a belief that other races ‘should keep a while away’. In O’Dowd’s ‘Our Land’, Australia is a ‘New Jerusalem’:

From Northern strife and Eastern sloth removed,
Australia and her herald gods invite
A chosen race, in sternest ordeals proved
To guard the future from exotic blight.⁸

Bean’s experience on the flagship confirmed his view that Australia must have a navy of its own, to hold the race-pure citadel, to secure ‘the place which Anglo-Saxon men and Anglo-Saxon ideas shall take and keep in the Pacific’. Bean was echoing the opinions of two of the most powerful voices in the land—the opinions of the premier politicians of the age, Alfred Deakin and William Morris (Billy) Hughes.

Deakin and Hughes were totally at odds temperamentally and socially. There were many things on which they disagreed. But on the matter of defence and race purity, they were as one. White Australia must have its own navy and its own army, for it could no longer depend wholly on British naval power. They believed Australia’s destiny would be played out in the Pacific where, by increments of imperial policy, the nation was increasingly alone, racially speaking. They were certain that, sooner or later, Japan would menace Australia.

Bean shared with Deakin and Hughes, and with others, the belief that Australia’s struggle was a struggle for racial survival. He reflected ruefully on the prodigious cost of preparing for war, but he could see no alternative:

After all it is based on one truth, which is a truth beyond question, that there are matters about which a man worth anything cannot compromise; that there are worse things than dying; that, if it comes to pass, life which would have to be lived not as you think right, but as some Asiatic may think right, is not worth living at all.⁹

Bean’s views on race had developed in the late Victorian age and were much influenced by the Social Darwinism of the times, notably by the notion that the races were not fixed in some God-given hierarchy but, on the contrary, enmeshed in a never-ending battle for survival. Anglo-Saxons transplanted to Australia constituted a great evolutionary experiment: would the British strain in the harsh circumstances of the colonies—the hard country, the withering sun—thrive or shrivel? Would this new land sap the vigour of the British race or would the challenge of what Bean called ‘the bush’ enhance that vigour? The question was taken very seriously. Some

worry warts saw alarming signs of debilitation. Some fixated on the influence of ‘convict blood’ in the colonial strain.

In Melbourne in 1875, Judge Redmond Barry set up an inquiry to discover whether ‘the race in its transplantation to Australian soil retains undiminished the vigour and fire and stamina of the strong old stock of which it is an offshoot’. The *Bulletin* insisted, rather defensively, that the Australian type was ‘as much the full-blown, white British subject as the Britisher himself’, perhaps more so, because all too often Londoners were emigrant Poles or Jews. But there was full-blown optimism too:

Far more certain in their loyalty to Empire and to the Anglo-Saxon race was a broad middle section of Australian opinion, neither fawningly Anglophile nor aggressively Anglophobe, but proud of both Australian and imperial achievement. It was their confidence in the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race and the crimson thread of kinship that gave them their confidence in the Australian type.¹⁰

The Southern Breed

Bean shared this optimism about the ‘Southern breed’. He thought the Australian strain, fired by the bush experience, was evolving a man of immense value to Anglo-Saxons the world over. The bush-fashioned Australian was, he wrote, ‘the Briton re-born, as it were—a Briton with the stamina and freshness of the 16th century living amongst the material advantages of the twentieth century’.¹¹

Bean was one of the few Australians to actually investigate the matter, as he understood it, of the relationship between environment and race evolution. He did so on assignment, touring the outback in 1909. His travels resulted in a series of reports published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Sydney Mail* and, subsequently, in two books in which he reaffirmed his theory that the harsh and primitive conditions of the inland were shaping a new and ever more vigorous branch of the British race.

Like many of his contemporaries, Bean was convinced that this trajectory could only be sustained by keeping race and nation entirely white and thus perfectly pure. All social ambition and all high ideals would come undone if Australia was to permit a mixing of the races.

Bean would hold to this view for decades, only much later coming to understand that race theory was a disreputable and devastating pseudoscience that lent itself to the most terrible human behaviour. Until then, he believed passionately that the measure of virtue and vigour was ‘in

the blood' and that the upward trajectory of racial evolution was a product of race conditioned by the environment. At Gallipoli, Bean saw the Australians in action and his faith in them was confirmed, but so was his less-than-flattering take on the ordinary British soldier:

The truth is that after 100 years of breeding in the slums, the British race is not the same, and can't be expected to be the same, as in the days of Waterloo. It is breeding one fine class at the expense of all the rest. The only hope for it is that these puny, narrow-chested little men may, if they come out to Australia or NZ or Canada, within two generations breed men again. England herself, unless she does something heroic, cannot hope to.¹²

This very private formulation, written in shorthand in a diary entry for 29 August 1915, never saw the light of day in Bean's lifetime.

Bean saw out the war in the most meritorious fashion, sharing many of the hardships of the troops at Gallipoli (where he was wounded but refused evacuation) and on the Western Front. His bravery became something of a legend among the troops: 'He had an unparalleled intimacy over four years with the experience of men at war.'¹³ In 1918 he was appointed the principal author and editor of what would become *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918*, which ran to fifteen volumes when completed in 1943. Bean wrote six of them, edited eight others and co-edited the volume on photography, a herculean labour across more than two decades. He would articulate the Anzac Legend in meticulous detail and faithful devotion to the archival record of men in war.¹⁴

The war was over when Bean began his *Official History*. The war was won. The Australians had passed the supreme test of character, and of racial fitness. But Australia was still not safe. Bean was in complete agreement with his prime minister, Billy Hughes, and the federal government: the war had been fought to annihilate German tyranny once and for all, *and* to keep Australia white. The epicentre of the conflict was in Europe but the destiny of the nation would be played out on the mighty stage of the Pacific. Germany had occupied the headlines, yet fear of Britain's ally, Japan, was the veiled strategic concern behind Australia's commitment to the war and the mighty sacrifice that involved, as we shall see in the chapters ahead.

Now the League of Nations threatened to abuse that sacrifice. Bean recorded these worries in his diary as early as February 1918: he wrote of 'the question of our relations with the Asiatic Races, which we intend to keep out of Australia'. He worried that if the issue of white Australia were to come before the league it might not have the least sympathy for the great

principle and might determine that Australia ‘must admit the Oriental races into our country’—an unbearable notion.¹⁵

The best outcome, he believed, would be an alliance between the English-speaking nations, and to that end it was most urgent that Australia cultivate the interest and sympathy of the formidable, white-ruled nation on the fringe of the Pacific, the United States of America. At war’s end, as the victorious nations prepared to shape the peace and share the spoils, Bean put his faith in forging an Anglo-Saxon federation, an alliance to ensure that Japan made no gains at the expense of white Australia.

In this regard—no concessions to Japan—he was in lockstep with Billy Hughes and his government. He would embark upon the *Official History* committed to an account of the war which, it would appear, deliberately ignored the elephant in the room. He would write a history that confirmed a perfect alignment of national and imperial interests, and he would evade the strategic significance of Japanese militarisation in the shaping of Australia’s war. Japan was Britain’s ally. Commonwealth leaders were required to disguise any public utterance of their race fears, to bite their tongues with respect to Japan. And Bean, the official historian, the dutiful civil servant, would avoid the issue entirely. He would provide a great account of soldiers at war, set in a censored strategic framework.¹⁶

At the end of his account of the Gallipoli landing, in the first volume of the *Official History*, published in 1921, Bean posed the question: what made the soldiers fight on? He concluded it was not love of a fight, nor the desire for fame, but a quality deep ‘in the mettle of the men’:

Life was very dear, but life was not worth living unless they could be true to their idea of Australian manhood. Standing upon that alone, when help failed and hope faded, when the end loomed clear in front of them, when the whole world seemed to crumble and the heaven to fall in, they faced its ruin undismayed.¹⁷

In his talk of ‘ruin’ we may hear the echo of Bean’s 1907 rhetoric and the sounding of the nation’s racial anxieties. We might also note the close connection in Bean’s thinking between four categories—war and manhood, race and nationhood. These categories were high-value denominations of the one national currency in so much thinking from the late Victorian era through to the Second World War, when Nazism compelled a rethink. In Bean’s mind, they were foremost.

The Many Makers of the Legend

It was surely inevitable that the Anzac Legend would burst forth in the form of a racial epic, a celebration of white Australian manhood, and no one man, not even Bean, can be credited with the creation of the legend, for it erupted irrepressibly from many quarters, from widely shared hopes and anxieties that demanded expression. If not Bean, then someone else would have led the way.

It was an English journalist, Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett, whose account of the Gallipoli landing was the first to reach the world's press, and was first reported in Australia on 8 May 1915. It could hardly have been better designed to stir the hearts of the waiting Australian audience. Ashmead-Bartlett's dispatch was a thrilling description, full of action and fearless heroism, confirming that the Australians had performed beyond all expectations. 'This race of athletes', he called them, and he wrote of how they had 'been tried for the first time and they had not been found wanting'.

The Australian press, along with the anxiously waiting readership, lapped it up for, as John Hirst noted, Ashmead-Bartlett's account conferred upon the Australians the British approval they so dearly craved. It did not matter that Ashmead-Bartlett was not actually there, that he watched the landing on the first day from the comparative comfort of HMS *London*, three kilometres out to sea.¹⁸

More dispatches from the Dardanelles were to follow, with Ashmead-Bartlett placing considerable emphasis on the physical perfection of the Anzac men:

I do not suppose that any country in its palmiest days ever sent forth to the field of battle a finer body of men than these Australian, New Zealand and Tasmanian troops. Physically they are the finest men I have ever seen in any part of the world. In fact, I had no idea such a race of giants existed in the twentieth century. Some of their battalions average 5' 10" and every man seems to be a trained athlete.¹⁹

Five days after the publication of Ashmead-Bartlett's opening flourish, the poet C. J. Dennis wrote 'Sari Bair' for the *Bulletin*, the first in a series of poems about Gallipoli, a tale that would become *The Moods of Ginger Mick*. In 'Sari Bair', Dennis affirmed the importance of war for the nation: 'An' we felt like little 'eroes as we watched the crowd recede, / Fer we sailed to prove Australia, an' our boastin' uv the breed.'

Ginger and his mates have come from ‘the cleanest land on earth’ and have to put up with dirty ‘Cairo wiv its niggers an’ its din’, but soon enough they land on the Gallipoli peninsula and the dead are everywhere: ‘An’ speckled o’er yer gleamin’ shore the little ’uddled ’eaps / That showed at last the Southern breed could play the game fer keeps.’

The story traces Ginger Mick’s progress from street larrikin and jailbird to a soldier hero at Gallipoli. In the course of this transition Mick’s ‘pride o’ class’ is overwhelmed by his ‘pride o’ race’. The revelation has ennobled him and raised him up—‘I know wot I wus born fer now, an’ soljerin’s me game,’ he says—and at the same time it has raised up the nation, for the soldiers ‘will fight to make our man’ood clean’.²⁰

‘Clean’ had several meanings. It was no accident that a hygiene booklet published for the departing soldiers in 1916 warned against ‘flighty women’ and venereal disease, and advised: ‘Come back clean, to be the fathers of a pure-blooded and virile Australian race.’²¹

The Moods of Ginger Mick was another publishing phenomenon. It sold 42,350 copies in six months and seventy thousand in its first four years. A special ‘pocket version’ was printed for the troops. Diggers carried *Ginger Mick* the way that Englishmen carried John Bunyan.²² Dennis’s biographer has noted how the poem, with its knockabout vernacular, managed to touch the hearts of so many Australians: ‘For a population shocked by the losses, missing loved ones, and needing an outlet for its feelings, *The Moods of Ginger Mick* provided a heady emotional cocktail. It depicted an array of sentiments and, more importantly, it encouraged its readers to feel a range of emotions such as affection, compassion, empathy, grief, happiness, love, pride and sadness,’ to which we might add racial affirmation, for pride of race is central to the story, as is the concept of the ‘Southern breed’.²³

In addition to Dennis, Australia had another nationally famous poet, A. B. ‘Banjo’ Paterson, and like Dennis he responded instinctively to the landing and the ongoing battles at Gallipoli. He published an open letter to the troops at the Dardanelles in the form of a poem, ‘We’re All Australians Now’. The poem declares Australia’s pride in its soldiers, reiterating the bush theme—‘from shearing shed and cattle run’—and the idea that the feats of the soldiers had scotched ‘old state jealousies’ and ‘petty quarrels’, and lifted the country into nationhood. What was the source of this phenomenal achievement?

The mettle that a race can show
Is proved with shot and steel,
And now we know what nations know
And feel what nations feel.²⁴

Just a few weeks after *The Moods* was launched, the Poet Laureate John Masefield's account of the Gallipoli campaign appeared in Australia. It was mostly concerned with the British troops but there was welcome praise for the Australians. Masefield did not hold back on the superlatives, calling them:

the finest body of young men ever brought together in modern times. For physical beauty and nobility of bearing they surpassed any men I have ever seen; they walked and looked like kings in old poems, and reminded me of the line in Shakespeare: 'Baited like eagles lately bathed.'²⁵

Another leading figure in launching the Anzac Legend was Keith Murdoch, a journalist who, by a combination of chance and tireless ambition, managed to become a personal propagandist for Billy Hughes. He would make of the war a foundation for his own newspaper empire. Contrary to the legend he created for himself, a legend subsequently enhanced and embellished by his son Rupert, Keith was not the brash Aussie speaking truth to the British. He was a cosier-up to men of power, a single-minded self-promoter, a white-race evangelist, a practitioner in the blackest arts of propaganda, and his ambition was boundless.²⁶

Murdoch visited Gallipoli in September 1915 and then wrote his famous Gallipoli letter—largely informed by Ashmead-Bartlett in the press camp on Imbros—criticising the conduct of the campaign, lavishly praising the Australians and attacking the performance of the British army at all levels.²⁷ Otherwise, he was pleased to report to the Australian prime minister (at that time Andrew Fisher) that the Australians were 'all of good parentage' and it was 'stirring to see them, magnificent manhood, swinging their fine limbs as they walked about Anzac [Cove]'. His cable reports for the press at home were in a similar vein. The Anzac, he wrote, was 'built on generous lines in every way...His physique was the wonder of the Mediterranean', so much so, said Murdoch, that soldiers from other countries chose 'to worship him as a super-type'.

One photograph moved Murdoch to near homoerotic eloquence. Writing for the *Sun* and other outlets in September 1915, he described the men of an Australian field battery feeding the guns: 'Stripped to the waist, straining at

their work, with faces like classical statues of ancient gladiators, these magnificent Australians give the impression of noble, young manhood.' Murdoch told his readers that his companion (unnamed) was so moved by the photo that he declared: 'I cannot look at it, or I shall weep at the sight of such splendid life.'²⁸

Murdoch was working for Sir Hugh Denison's United Cable Service in the *Times* building when Prime Minister Billy Hughes arrived in London in March 1916. Murdoch and Hughes shared an obsessive fear of Japan's wartime ambitions and a fierce attachment to the view that the war was a regenerative process for the Anglo-Saxon race. The prime minister and the journalist gelled. Murdoch led the press campaign to make Hughes a household name in Britain. Hughes's biographer observes that Murdoch's relentless promotion helps to explain how 'a small, wizened, colonial Welshman, very deaf, often unwell and with a rasping voice' came to have such an impressive effect. Murdoch wrote home to George Pearce, the acting prime minister, advising that he had orchestrated a triumph: 'We... introduced Hughes properly to the proprietors and editors, to the leader writers, got out some books on him, and so forth, and Hughes himself did the rest.'

Murdoch edited a collection of Hughes's speeches on tour, *'The Day'—And After*, and it became a bestseller, the text punctuated for easy reading with subheadings such as 'Stripped for the Fray', 'John Bull Aroused', 'On National Regeneration' and 'Survival of the Fittest'. Hughes's fiery words on how the war was 'purging' the race of its 'dross' were presented under the subheading 'The Silver Lining'.²⁹ The bereaved parents of dead or debilitated soldiers may have wondered as to his meaning.

Like Hughes and Bean, Murdoch believed the war would regenerate the nation, charge the blood with new vigour and prevent the 'feminisation' of the manhood. As propagandist for Billy Hughes, he portrayed the Anzacs as exemplars of a superior race under newspaper headlines such as 'Australians—The Perfect Soldiers'. Hughes and Murdoch were committed to seeing Germany crushed and to maximising Australian credit at the bargaining table, in order to ensure that Japan, at the end of the war, made no inroads on white Australia. And with this in mind they were committed, as one, to forcing conscription on the home front. Murdoch was so anxious to have conscription that he privately told the prime minister it was 'a pity

the aborigines were not Prussianized', that is, forcibly trained and drafted into military service.³⁰

Here is cultural simultaneity at work: when conditions are ripe for an idea, it will sprout in many different forms and different places, more or less simultaneously. Legend can be told and retold by anyone, with infinite variations, and still be recognisable as itself. It is a way to lay claim to faith in certain values or certain ideas. Thus, by the end of 1916, the Anzac Legend was already alive, the telling and the retelling surfacing like bubbles in the national pond, in little country newspapers and mainstream dailies; in commemorative speeches, sermons, state and national parliaments; in school texts and books and pamphlets and lantern-slide shows; in celebrity tours—Ashmead-Bartlett toured Australia in 1916—and even in film.³¹ This was a blooming in which Ashmead-Bartlett, C. J. Dennis, 'Banjo' Paterson, Keith Murdoch, Billy Hughes and, of course, Charles Bean led the way, followed by many less prominent contributors.³² Together they constituted a flowering of racial affirmations and with that flowering the racial legend, an epic for white Australia, was underway.

The War—And After

Touted as an exuberant expression of Australian nationhood, the war was a trial by fire in which the vigour of the blood, and thus the manhood, was confirmed. But the sacrifice was equally a down payment on a guarantee for white Australia—a feature of the story that has been sorely neglected. At the highest levels of Australian politics, fear of Japan could not be appeased. Nothing in the way of nationhood would be secured until that guarantee was ironclad. In years to come Murdoch would continue to pose the question: will Britain, if needs be, fight for a white Australia? And Hughes would fight tenaciously, throughout the war and at the peace conference at Versailles, to future-proof white Australia, to confound Japan, to get the assurances he desperately wanted and to secure the race purity of the nation.

Hughes was not displeased with the outcome for, ultimately, the settlement at Versailles was a racial triumph for the prime minister, as he explained in a speech to the Commonwealth parliament in 1919:

We are more British than the people of Great Britain, and we hold firmly to that great principle of White Australia because we know what we know. We have these liberties, and we believe in our race and in ourselves, and in our capacity to achieve our great destiny, which is to hold this vast continent in trust for those of our race who come after us.³³

Likeminded leaders were spouting the same creed at the community level. In the Roman Catholic Church at Roma in Queensland, the Reverend Father Paul Lynch delivered a long Anzac Day sermon in 1920, concluding with a heartfelt plea to his congregation:

For God's sake...let us close our ranks and be united as were the 'Diggers' over there. Union is the stronghold of true patriotism. 1,750,000,000 is the present population of the world; the white race are only 550,000,000; that leaves 1,200,000,000 of the coloured races. While the white races double every 80 years, the yellow do so every 60, and the black every 40. I ask you, can we afford disunion? The task has fallen from the nerveless hands of those 60,000 [dead] whose memories we cherish. Let their voices ever urge us onwards and upwards that we also may pass triumphantly from these plains of earth to the Paradise of God.³⁴

Charles Bean also wrote a plea not to waste the peace. In 1918, he penned a ninety-six-page exhortation, *In Your Hands, Australians*, calling on his fellow countrymen to do good works, to build the nation, make it prosperous, free, *clean and white*—to ensure the sixty thousand had not died in vain.

Much of what Bean wrote echoed his pre-war opinions on small towns and big cities, and the evolutionary advantages of bush life, its importance for the manhood of Australia. There was also the familiar theme of the Anglo-Saxon Commonwealth, 'the last land open to the white man', needing to build relations with the great white-dominated nations of the Pacific—the United States, Canada, New Zealand and 'perhaps South Africa'. But the core conviction, expressed with unusual vehemence in the form of italics and a rat-tat-tat rhythm, was Bean's insistence on a white Australia. The objective of 'internal policy', he wrote, must be to make Australia

the most beautiful, happy place for Australians to live in, with *our* sort of homes, and *our* sort of towns and cities, and *our* sort of games and occupations, and *our* sort of families, and *our* sort of marriages and laws, and *our* idea of fair trials—but how about other nations? How [about] if they were to say: 'No; you have got to make homes to suit us there, too. We are going to come in and set up *our* sort of ideas about work and play; *our* sort of schools to make all the population into *our* sort of people.' We Australians are firmly and definitely determined that that shall not happen.

Foreign policy, similarly, would be an assertion of race purity, 'our people' shaping the nation accordingly: 'That is our foreign policy—we call it the

White Australia policy.’³⁵

Today we remember the First World War as the story of awful conflict in Turkey, Palestine and Europe; but, for Australia’s political leadership, the story behind the story was the fear of Japan. In chapters to come we will follow this strategic motivation through to Billy Hughes’s triumph at Versailles. But first we must chart the long history of race fear across the half-century prior to 1914. Without an understanding of that prelude, we cannot begin to understand Australia’s war. Nor will we see the obvious question: how could all this, and the racial dimension of the war itself, be forgotten, lost to our national memory?

2

Space Invaders

‘We are well aware that China can swamp us with a year’s supply of surplus population...we are guarding the last part of the world in which the higher races can live and increase freely, for the higher civilization.’

Charles Pearson, *National Life and Character: A Forecast*, 1893

When European powers moved into the South Pacific in the 1870s, colonial governments in Australia responded with expansionist proposals of their own. They called on the British government to colonise various island groups—notably New Guinea and the New Hebrides—in order to deny its imperial rivals a foothold in the southern hemisphere. There were commercial and missionary interests who applauded these calls—Burns Philp & Co. and the Scots Presbyterians—but the prime motivation was always security: the fear that a foreign power such as France, Germany or that recurring menace Russia might use these islands as a launching pad for raids on the Australian coast or, worse, invasion and occupation.¹

Colonial politicians who worried about the security of the Australian continent wanted the Pacific to be a British pond and the islands a buffer against threats from the north. With this in mind they formulated their own Monroe Doctrine, an insistence that European powers should keep out. But the colonies were sorely disappointed, for these powers could not be kept out and, worst of all, the experience provided sobering confirmation that Britain could not be relied upon to accord high priority to Australia’s security concerns. A succession of British governments regarded Australian

apprehensions as extravagant and irrational and, anyway, of secondary importance to business elsewhere.²

In turn, Australia's political leaders expressed their shock and disappointment at Britain's failure to deliver the entitlements that they believed unfailing loyalty had earned and their hostility to what Edmund Burke had long before called 'remote dictation'. By degrees they came to understand that Australia's security concerns did not always fit with imperial strategy, that Britain might well forsake them for a greater cause.³

A New Epoch

The comfort that Australians found in isolation began to dissolve almost half a century before the First World War. In 1870 the British garrisons were withdrawn from Australia, the regiments (like blood) retreating to the vital organs as the chill antagonisms of Europe combined with the burden of empire in other parts. The colonies were now required to assume responsibility for their own defence. British soldiers were never more popular in the Antipodes than when they were ordered home. Popularity and anxiety were close cousins. That same year the Franco-Prussian war upset the established order in Europe. The *Sydney Morning Herald* declared a new 'epoch in the war of the races has clearly begun', and the repercussions for the colonies were alarming: 'The course of events is tending to destroy the security which Australians have hitherto found in isolation...Space and distance have lost their old meaning. The great net of international rivalry catches the whole world in its sweep.'⁴

In July 1870 the colonial premiers called on the British government to annex the Fiji Islands, and in the following decades they called for more of the same—the annexation of New Guinea, the New Hebrides, the Solomons and more. They insisted that this was not imperialism of any kind, not a lust for territory or trade but, rather, a determination to keep Australia safe from 'European complications': to have a natural barrier, an outlying frontier against potential enemies, island ramparts in British hands. It was the beginning of an obsession with the Pacific that would carry through to 1914 and profoundly shape Australia's journey to war.

With the exception of Fiji, annexed by the Disraeli government in 1874, the British were not inclined to take on the burden of a scattering of islands

in the South Pacific. Fiji only gave rise to false hopes. For decades to come, the urgings of the colonial premiers, and then of the Commonwealth government, fell on deaf ears. For Britain, other considerations were clearly at work. As a matter of principle, London would not be stampeded and, as ever, the colonies wanted security on the cheap—they would implore Britain to occupy the South Pacific, yet they would not commit to the cost of administration. That hardly mattered in London, as imperial priorities lay elsewhere: Egypt, North Africa, India, China, the Mediterranean, the Atlantic. The islands of the Pacific might be useful pawns in the imperial game but otherwise they did not rate.

Imperial Britain was working on a big canvas. Occupation of Egypt in 1882 had led to strained relations with France, and an urgent need for German support and goodwill in that sphere. When the Germans declared their intentions in New Guinea in 1884, Britain readily complied, conceding the north-east quarter of the island in return for a complementary acknowledgment—German acceptance of a British claim on the south-east quarter. The response at the highest levels in the Australian colonies was alarm and disgust. The Victorian premier, James Service, a Scot with close ties to the Presbyterian missionaries in the Pacific, expressed his ‘boundless’ exasperation. In a cable written for Colonial Office consumption he wrote: ‘I protest in the name of the present and future of Australia. If England does not yet save us from the danger and disgrace, as far at least as New Guinea is concerned, the bitterness of feeling towards her will not die out in this generation.’⁵

Such was the pattern: time and again colonial leaders pressed the government in London to intervene, annex, raise the flag here, there, to pre-empt some European power from cribbing into the South Pacific. And time and again, Britain refused. When this impasse took form at the first Colonial Conference, in London in 1887, the youngest of the colonial delegates was Alfred Deakin, just thirty-one, native-born, acolyte of Service and already a star among a new generation ascending to positions of influence in colonial politics.

Deakin came to London intent upon furthering the cause of Australian security in the South Pacific. He was a man of great intellect, eloquence, charm and courage; not inclined to humble acquiescence in any company, even among the rulers of the world; and prepared to make a fuss about

British policy in the southern hemisphere. His main concern on this occasion was the designs of the French in the New Hebrides.

The French were already established in New Caledonia, where they maintained a penal colony for the political opponents of Napoleon III and others, Communards and criminals whose presence in the Pacific was a galling reminder of Australia's convict past and a problem for the east-coast colonies: 247 of these French convicts were recorded as having escaped to Australia between 1874 and 1883; and, following the German occupation of New Guinea, French troops arrived in the New Hebrides, allegedly to protect their settlers.⁶ The French intervention had alarmed and outraged colonial governments in Australia; and the contingent in London in 1887, led by Service and Deakin, was primed to press the case for British annexation.

When the business of the Pacific islands was finally discussed the debate did not go smoothly. The British prime minister, Lord Salisbury, put several arguments to the colonial delegates: 'the distance of the New Hebrides from Australia made anxiety unnecessary; France could not be "negotiated" out of the islands; it was absurd to expect the Empire to go to war on the question; it was unwise to quarrel with France about islands so near to New Caledonia'. And the cessation of French transportation to the Pacific in exchange for French freedom of action in the New Hebrides might be a trade-off worth exploring, might it not?⁷

But Salisbury sorely misjudged the Australian delegates. For all the hostility to convicts in the Pacific, the Australians disliked even more the prospect of conceding the fight and surrendering the New Hebrides to France. The delegates spoke fiercely against any compromise and quite possibly induced the speedy settlement that followed: a joint naval supervision of the islands was agreed soon after the conference, and the New Hebrides was left with an indeterminate status. For the Australians this compromise was better than French annexation and it meant, for the time being at least, that other powers were warned off. But Deakin and his fellow delegates were not happy. Once again, Britain had let them down; once again, it appeared an accommodation with another great European power took priority over Australia's security.

Equally, Salisbury was frustrated by the failure of the Australians to appreciate that the empire's strategic concerns must outweigh all regional interests. He spoke privately of Australian *outrecuidance*, meaning audacity

or presumption. He wrote to the secretary of state for the colonies about his exasperation the day after the vigorous exchange:

It does seem to me that they are the most unreasonable people I ever heard of or dreamt of. They want us to incur all the bloodshed, the dangers and the stupendous cost of war with France, of which almost the exclusive burden will fall on us, for a group of islands which, to us, are as valueless as the South Pole, and to which they are only attached by a debating club sentiment.⁸

Neither Britain nor France were much interested in the New Hebrides. The vehemence of their Pacific constituents required them to take notice. But when they did take notice they were compelled to do so with larger concerns to the fore. The Australians were not inclined to roll over in the interests of empire. They took Britain's unwillingness to support their claims as further proof of untrustworthiness. They chafed at what they saw as contempt for their security in the Pacific. And there was more of this to come.

Awakening Asia

Australia's earliest impulses towards federation sprang from doubts about security, and such doubts continued to be central to the cause of federation through the 1890s. But in that decade new dangers began to agitate the colonial mind. White Australian anxieties were shifting to what Sir Henry Parkes called an 'awakening' Asia.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, tens of thousands of Chinese fled their near-ruined kingdom, mostly to South-East Asia, but some came to Australia, inspired by tales of space and prosperity to the far south. The Taiping rebellion (1850–64) had caused the deaths of many millions. Famines and droughts killed vast numbers in the decades thereafter. Traditional society was collapsing under the weight of desolation, and the effects of unequal treaties imposed by Britain and other European powers. When a new wave of Chinese surged into the colonies in the 1880s they were no more welcome than they had been during the gold rush thirty years before.⁹

Asia in the late nineteenth century did not present an immediate military threat to the Australian mainland, although Parkes was fond of quoting Napoleon's maxim that if only the Chinese had a navy they would conquer the world. It was unarmed invasion that troubled white Australians at this

time, what the *Australasian* in 1878 called ‘a swarming race of three hundred million, which lately had shown such an inconvenient disposition to mobility’.¹⁰ The notion of a ‘swarm’ or a ‘tidal flood’ or of ‘vast hordes cast loose’ was common. Billy Hughes thought Australia ‘the natural prey of the teeming, sweating millions of the East’, while Parkes spoke of a sinister, creeping population movement that had to be stopped before it was too late.

Social Darwinism lent a veneer of scientific rectitude to these fears, casting the world as a racial battlefield and nations as racial entities that must conquer or be conquered. Call-to-arms pamphlets and novels in which the Australian land mass was imperilled or ruined by Asiatic invasion found a ready readership in the colonies. A new obsession with racial vulnerability took hold. Anti-Chinese fears were stoked by politicians and journalists committed to a kind of racial evangelism, the common thread being that sooner or later the Chinese would, in one way or another, degrade or destroy the white race in Australia. The *Bulletin* in 1886 saw the Chinese in Australia as nothing more than ‘disease, defilement, depravity, misery and crime’.

The presentation of the so-called ‘Chinese problem’ in the illustrated newspapers and in print generally was increasingly couched in alarmist forms, warning the community of their sexual depravity and their diseases, to considerable effect: if propaganda cannot create racism, it nevertheless can nurture and inflame opinion. The mainstream press as much as the fiercely racist doomsayers on the radical fringe used the idea of racial pollution to insist upon the vulnerability of all that white men and women held dear. Journalists pitted purity against impurity, wholesomeness against defilement. Disease became a metaphor, a menace that threatened the nation. Politicians such as Parkes played on race fear to perfection, perhaps most notably during the 1881 smallpox epidemic in Sydney.¹¹

Disease was readily coupled with race. The *Bulletin* thought the Chinese ‘a cancer in a white community’ and insisted—with all the logic of quarantine law—that ‘even the restricted inflow of coloured races means social disease for the present, social danger in the future.’ The implication was clear: with ‘disease’, half measures were pointless.¹² In 1901 Hughes would call the coloured presence a ‘leprous curse’, and the *Sydney Morning Herald* would sing praise for the White Australia legislation, calling it ‘a stone wall against the danger of race pollution’.

Devastating plague was as familiar to colonial Australians as it was to people in Europe and Asia. In the 1870s a smallpox epidemic wiped out millions worldwide. Cholera and yellow fever regularly took a terrible toll. The idea of ‘contamination’ required no hard sell. It was alive and well in the colonial mind and it was, therefore, easily transmissible, the notion as readily applied to cities and nations, and most importantly to race, as it was to the human body. The radical labour paper the *Boomerang* routinely prophesied the Chinese presence as a death knell for the white race:

Day by day, year by year, the Chinese are a source of anxious thought and trouble, and what do we get from them in return? Absolutely nothing. They skin our gold-fields, they debauch our children, they undersell our merchants, shopkeepers, and producers, availing themselves of trade-tricks and subterfuges, such as no honest community could descend to, in order to achieve the white man’s ruin more rapidly. And then, to crown all, there is the hideous certainty, already casting its ink-black shadows before, that in spite of our ceaseless watchfulness, the Chinaman will eventually import along with his sour, greasy carcase some one of the fearful plagues which have scourged the impure races of the East for many centuries.¹³

Humphrey McQueen’s *A New Britannia* (1970) was a milestone at the time of publication in its demonstration of how racism, such as the version we find in the *Boomerang*, was central to the message of trade unionism in the colonies and was ‘the lynchpin’ of Australian nationalism. Our colonial history was not as glowing as conservative and radical-nationalist historians alike had insisted. Most labour leaders were outspoken racists. Billy Hughes was in agreeable company.

One of this company was the fanatic William Lane (1861–1917), who is perhaps best remembered for departing Australia in 1893—perhaps fleeing the Asian menace—to establish a utopian community in Paraguay. But before his departure, Lane made a sustained contribution to race hatred by way of his journalism. In the *Wagga Hummer* in April 1892 he pontificated on miscegenation, declaring he would ‘rather see his daughter dead in her coffin than kissing one of them on the mouth, or nursing a little coffee-coloured brat that she was mother to’.¹⁴ His first novel was a race-hate fiction, *White or Yellow? A Story of Race War in A.D. 1908*. It was serialised in the *Boomerang* over February–May 1888.

Here, the fear of miscegenation stirs violent intent from the outset. The story is set in Queensland, where a corrupt Anglo-Australian elite has seized power with the help of prominent Chinese who have infiltrated industry, politics and the judiciary at the highest levels. Their rise has been facilitated by the untrustworthy British, who have granted them civil rights.

One of the heroes is Bob Flynn, who says of his sweetheart, Cissie, ‘I’d sooner kill her with my own hands than have her live to raise a brood of coloured curs.’

The idea of the ‘half-breed’ or the ‘piebald’ was symbolic of the avowed need to protect white women from, in some cases, their own shallowness or gullibility, but more so from the sexual depravity of Chinese males. It transpires that Bob does not have to kill Cissie. Instead he finds her dead in a paddock. ‘She had died defending her honour’ against the lascivious Sir Wong Hung Foo, and her violation provides the trigger for a ‘cleansing’ war and the realisation of a nationality pure in its bloodlines, unviolated by the Asian hordes.¹⁵

The thinking of many colonial politicians was in synch with the fears of the fanatical sentinels—invasion-fiction hacks such as Lane. In 1889, when Parkes called for a federal constitution in order to ‘preserve the security and integrity’ of the colonies, the only concern he cited was defence. War in Europe might well imperil Australia, but the more sinister menace was ‘the countless millions of inferior members of the human family who are within easy sail of these shores’. Parkes’s warning grew more explicit with every repetition. He foresaw an Australia endangered by a new form of warfare, as he explained at the Federal Convention of 1891:

I think it is more than likely, more than probable, that forms of aggression will appear in these seas which are entirely new to the world...We have evidence abundant on all hands that the Chinese nation and other Asiatic nations...are awakening to all the power which their immense population gives them in the art of war, in the art of acquisition and all the other arts known to European civilization, and it seems to me... that if we are to suffer in this direction at any time, it will not be by the bombardment of one of our rich cities—it will not be by an attack upon our seaborne commerce—it will not be by any attempt to lay us under a ransom to protect our property and our lives, but it will be by stealthily...effecting a lodgement in some thinly-populated portion of the country, where it would take immense loss of life and immense loss of wealth to dislodge the invader.¹⁶

Parkes has been remembered as the Father of Federation. He was also the father of the Yellow Peril tradition in Australian foreign policy. But we might just as readily claim that title for Deakin, who was the foremost spokesman for a race-pure union of the colonies *and* a national defence to enforce it: for an uncompromising rejection of Asia. In the 1890s he spoke passionately for a federal constitution inspired by ‘enlightened liberalism’, yet the hard core of his case for federation was barely disguised race fear, reminding us yet again that the colonial mindset coupled the highest ideals with race purity:

Let us recognize that we live in an unstable era...and that if we fail in the hour of crisis we may never be able to recall our lost national opportunities. At no period during the first hundred years has the situation of the great Empire to which we belong been more serious. From the far east and the far west alike we behold *menaces and contagion*. We cannot evade, we must meet them.¹⁷

The Last Citadel

The radical poet and critic Francis Adams (1862–93) saw the threat of unarmed invasion as a continuation of the workings of natural law over thousands of years. He conjured a vision of ancient civilisations, once mighty but long fallen, with nothing left of them but majestic ruins. The same natural law was still at work, he argued. Adams foretold a mighty struggle: ‘The Asiatic...must either conquer or be conquered by, must wipe out or be wiped out by the Aryan and the European.’ Just as nations had been overwhelmed in the past, so they might be again in the battle for racial supremacy.

Adams believed that the long age of European dominance was imperilled. He thought Australia, the last pure citadel of Anglo-Saxonism, was sure to be centre stage in the struggle to come. He took the view, uncommon at the time, that the Chinese were to be feared precisely because of their virtues—their efficiency, their dietary moderation, their hard work, their law-abiding behaviour and their discipline.¹⁸ Deakin would argue something similar in his case against the Japanese in years to come; and, like Deakin, Adams could see only one solution—the expulsion of them all.

Deakin’s views were broadly in line with the predictions of his mentor, the scholar and politician Charles Pearson, whose *National Life and Character: A Forecast*, published in 1893, was something of a sensation in intellectually serious circles in Australia, Britain and the United States. Pearson was not confident about the future for the ‘higher races of man’. He foresaw these higher races would soon find themselves ‘elbowed and hustled and perhaps even thrust aside’ by peoples formerly thought to be servile. He considered Australia one of the last strongholds of the white race, but a stronghold now imperilled by the Chinese. ‘We are well aware,’ he wrote, ‘that China can swamp us with a year’s supply of surplus population... we are guarding the last part of the world in which the higher races can live and increase freely, for the higher civilization.’¹⁹

Whether their virtues or their vices were the greatest danger to Australian standards was moot. Adams feared the virtues, but far more common in the popular press and popular opinion was the view that Chinese vices were the problem, and these vices were so terrible that their bearers must be expelled and a legislative wall erected to ensure they never came back. The *Bulletin* thought the vices were indeed terrible but the virtues perhaps worse: 'When he is simply vicious the vice is destructive; when criminal, a menace to the State; when industrious, he threatens revolution to the social structure.' No matter what they did, the Chinese were bound to give offence.²⁰

Henry Lawson declared he found some Chinamen tolerable but he was certain that collectively they threatened race disintegration. 'I am anti-Chinese as far as Australia is concerned. In fact, I am all for a White Australia,' he wrote. Henry Handel Richardson's *Australia Felix* portrayed the Chinese as 'fearsome bodies' living in 'dens of infamy', dirty creatures lacking any redeeming feature. Her novel was published in 1917, but it drew heavily on her childhood memories prior to leaving Australia in 1887 and was further enriched by a brief visit to gather material in 1912.²¹

William Lane saw no merit at all in the Chinese, individually or collectively. They were merely an impediment to a coming national greatness, as indeed were 'skin-deep' whites—'the purse-proud squatters and our selfish rich'—who might tolerate them:

They may cry down as unreliable the stories of Chinese outrages upon women and children. They may go further if they will and defame the manhood of their own race by elevating above it the meeker and more insinuating Chinaman. Suppose they do... There simply isn't room enough in Australia for two civilizations... they will sneak in at the windows if we guard the doors... Australia is ours. It belongs to us, the white people of Australia and to the white people who are coming here to build a great white State.²²

There were voices who spoke out against such views, for racist hostility was by no means universal. But an overwhelming majority of white colonials across classes shared with Lawson and Lane, Parkes and Deakin the belief that the Chinese had to be expelled, along with all other coloured races in the country. Deakin claimed, correctly, that the creed of race purity was the great unifier among white Australians: 'no motive operated more powerfully in dissolving the... political divisions which previously separated us, than the desire that we should be one people and remain one people without the mixture of races.'²³

Deakin would also endorse federation on the grounds that it was ‘the principal means of curbing the ineptitudes of Downing Street’.²⁴ The untrustworthiness of Britain on matters of security and race is a theme that runs throughout his career. Across his political life we see an uneasy tension between loyalty to the Mother Country and the desire to protect the Australian national interest, his commitment to the latter never faltering. Hughes would take up this baton when Deakin faded from the political scene, and he would carry it into the First World War. But until that time, it was Deakin who led the way. In Deakin in the 1890s we see a clear-eyed appreciation that his native land had a set of vital interests that were not the same as Britain’s.²⁵ This tension was writ large in colonial and Commonwealth politics over many decades, and it came into sharp focus when Britain and Japan signed the Anglo–Japanese commercial treaty in 1894.

The treaty conferred reciprocal rights of residence, trade and land acquisition, recognising that Japan was fully entitled to the rights of civilised nations, for it had built a powerful nation state with its own imperialist vision. This new, cohesive entity was determined not to fall prey to the European powers, not to be carved up like China but, on the contrary, to transcend ‘backward Asia’ and share in the spoils of empire. The treaty was another mark of Japan’s astonishing progress, its honorary membership of ‘civilised Europe’, its mastery of the much-admired creative arts, *japonaiserie*, as much as the art of war.²⁶

London encouraged the colonies to sign on, citing the economic advantages, and reminding Deakin and his colleagues that the exclusion of coloured peoples violated the traditions of empire which made, they insisted, no distinction in favour of or against race or colour.²⁷ The Australian colonies were not free to sign treaties independently, but they were free to refuse to enter into British treaties and to stand apart if they so chose. Many months of debate followed in the colonial parliaments. Some of these parliaments were discussing their own restrictive immigration legislation at the very time they were fast coming to the conclusion that the treaty was not a good idea, and that all too often Britain put trade considerations and commercial gain ahead of higher ideals, such as race purity.

While some politicians and businessmen spoke up for a trading future with Asia, they did not hold sway in the public debate. The parliaments

firmly rejected the idea, insisting that Australia must be racially pure and must reach out, not to the coloured nations, but to the white-dominated communities on the Pacific fringe, notably the United States. The colonies, with the exception of Queensland, rejected the treaty; and even Queensland, with a plantation economy that was heavily dependent on coloured labour, would soon come around by means of a race-sensitive protocol in which the right of both parties to regulate the immigration of labourers and artisans was expressly recognised.²⁸

The rejection of the treaty was firmly backed by the labour movement and powerful protectionist interests who feared the domestic markets would be flooded by cheap Japanese goods. The *Sydney Morning Herald* was adamant that no commercial benefits would ever outweigh ‘the evils that might come upon Australia from an unrestricted influx of Asiatics, such as would be rendered possible by the Treaty as it stands’.

The *Melbourne Age* took a similar position. ‘Mere traders’, it argued, might take a commercial view of the treaty but colonial governments had a higher duty. They must consider whether ‘the design of making Australasia a permanent home for the Anglo-Saxon race is to be maintained or abandoned’. The upshot was never in doubt: trading interests who saw a future for Australia in engagement with Asia were drowned out by the advocates of a white bastion committed to a walled seclusion.²⁹

Well before federation, and long before the war, Australia’s leaders were proceeding in defiance of London, determined to have racial purity at any cost, including the economic cost and the cost of deeply offending all of Asia.³⁰

The Unclean Thing

White Australians alone among the settler societies of the world chose to define their nation exclusively in terms of race chauvinism, and to banish the coloured and allegedly ‘unassimilable’ races from their midst.

Elsewhere, the coloured population was just too large, or too vital to the settler economy, for banishment to be feasible or desirable. But that hardly answers the question: why were white Australians so passionately, so obsessively committed to race purity—to making it the defining principle of their nation?

In the language of national citizenship, we find a clue. With the creation of the Commonwealth, the colonies were to be reconstituted as states. Contemporaries yearned for this change, for the word ‘colony’ was all too often felt to be a badge of inferiority that meant second-rate. And there was a double handicap, due to the association with the origins of white settlement—the ‘convict colonies’ and the hereditary notion of ‘bad blood’ passed down from one generation to another, a pervading stain, or what Anthony Trollope saw in the faces he encountered while touring Australia: ‘the Bill Sikes physiognomy’.³¹

Historians also point to the perceived sense of strategic vulnerability—the large, ‘empty’ continent with a small white population so near to Asia and so far from ‘Home’. But this explanation is but part of the answer.³² As British officials kept saying, the implacable progression to total exclusion was a source of severe insult and aggravation in Asia, most notably in Japan. Some kind of compromise would surely have been more prudent, and perhaps more lucrative?³³

We are led inevitably to what the language of racial anxiety, in conjunction with the pivotal moment, might tell us: the rapid progression towards federation in Australia coincided with what contemporaries understood as the battle for racial supremacy. This placed a special obligation, a racial responsibility we might say, on the makers of the nation—to hold this vast continent in trust for the generations to come.

As Pearson, Deakin, Bean, Hughes, Adams, Lane, Lawson and other prophesiers made clear, the racial world was poised precariously in favour of the white race, the Anglo-Saxon race in particular. This conferred a considerable responsibility on Australia, the one and only continent that might still be properly British. In Pearson’s words, in 1893: ‘the last part of the world in which the higher races can live and increase freely’. In Bean’s, in 1907: ‘the last land open to the white man—the only one that can be purely British’.

Bean’s words in 1907 were as redolent of anxiety as Pearson’s formulation fourteen years before. We have a right to be confident, he insisted, but he did not always sound confident, particularly when he conjured Australia’s emptiness and isolation in tremulous prose: ‘This little nation of 5,000,000 people,’ he wrote in the final year of the war, ‘making its own way for itself and thinking out its own problems in its big, lonely Continent at the far corner of the world.’ And in the war and its aftermath,

there was nothing but the mettle of the men between salvation and racial ruin.³⁴

The idea of Australia as an Anglo-Saxon citadel placed a singular racial obligation on the founding fathers who came together in the first Commonwealth parliament to debate and pass the Immigration Restriction Act. It was no accident that when Prime Minister Barton commended the bill to the parliament, he held a copy of Pearson's *National Life and Character* in his hand and quoted from the celebrated tome, at length, on the peril confronting the white races.³⁵

A heady mix underpinned the determination to insulate the nation against 'contamination'. The Commonwealth was formed at a moment of dramatic convergence—menace and promise coming together, dire peril and sacred mission entwined; ruin stalking greatness within reach.

Whether by way of the pollution of the body (disease) or the degradation of the blood (miscegenation, whereby 'white blood runs thinner and thinner'), the coloured races were seen to threaten everything. Race dilution meant the spiking of all the fine attributes associated with untainted blood and virile manhood.³⁶ Most of all, the coloured races were seen to threaten the expectations of national greatness that came with Australia's federation. In the outlook that carried the day, there was not much point in national unification without racial purity. All premonitions of upward progress and greatness hinged on that. Pearson identified Australia's racial anxieties as 'the instinct of self-preservation quickened by experience'; while Deakin declared there was no room for compromise, for the people were determined, he wrote, 'to make no truce with coloured immigration, to have no traffic with the unclean thing'.³⁷

The White Australia policy was not merely about keeping other types out. It was a desirable end in itself, racial homogeneity being a precondition for social reform and a high standard of living, for the constitutional vigour of the race, the high ideals, the upward evolutionary trajectory associated with the new Commonwealth. There was a vast reservoir of emotional investment in the coming nation. 'Race pollution' was akin to ruin, while race purity was embraced as a positive ideal, the indispensable prerequisite for the principles on which white Australian social and political life was based.

It was the vision that fired Bernard O'Dowd's song to a 'chosen race' proven in 'sternest ordeals': a chosen race guarding against 'exotic blight',

a clear reference to Asia. O'Dowd didn't know it, but he was foretelling Australia's road to the First World War.³⁸

The Declaration of White Australia

‘We want a white Australia, and are we to be denied it because we shall offend the Japanese or embarrass His Majesty’s Ministers? I think not.’

Billy Hughes, *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, 12 September 1901

‘So far as the Imperial Government is concerned it is not a question of manhood or race in the same way as it is with us, but purely a question of trade.’

Richard Crouch, *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, 20 September 1901

Australians in the early 1890s were more familiar with the quaintly exotic Japan of the *Mikado*—first performed in Australia in 1886—than they were with the formidable steel of the Imperial Japanese Navy. The Japanese had turned to Britain to modernise their fleet and raise up their engineering schools to the highest standards. This they did, spectacularly, in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, as the economic historian Olive Checkland observes: ‘In general terms the interrelationship between the makers and operators of ships in Britain and Japan led to constant traffic between the two countries, generated substantial business for British industry and opened up a wide range of employment opportunities for the British in Japan.’ Observers in the know began to speak of Japan as ‘Elizabethan’ in its energies and ambition, to make a clear distinction between that admirable nation and the rest of Asia.

Critics said Britain had stirred Japan into restless energy, awakening the most dangerous of territorial longings. And in so doing, they sold an industry overseas, for no other course was possible. Trade rivalry between the great European powers was as fierce in Japan as elsewhere. Britain's share of world trade was slipping and would continue to slip. In a world of ruthless economic competition, with Germany and America pushing eagerly for business, the British could do naught but press on to ever firmer ties with Japanese government and industry. They had forged a close association with this North Pacific nation through trade in general, and military hardware, shipping and armaments in particular.¹

At a time when Britain was bogged down in the Boer War, with no allies in Europe and deeply troubled by Russian ambition in the Far East (Manchuria and the North Pacific), Japan had become an ally that it could not afford to lose. Consternation in Australia would grow by increments, from the 1890s through to the war years.

At the turn of the century, commercial and strategic imperatives pressed the British government to seek allies. Japan had signed a commercial treaty with Britain in 1894 and adopted the gold standard in 1897,² and in 1902 the two nations signed the Anglo-Japanese alliance, committing each party to come to the aid of the other in defence of their Far Eastern interests should either be attacked by more than one power.³ The articles of the alliance were formulated in London just as the new Commonwealth parliament in Melbourne was framing a bipartisan policy aimed at the exclusion of 'all coloured peoples', thus uniquely defining the Australian nation as 'white' and making racial purity the marker of national identity.

Australian politicians took no part in the shaping of the alliance with Japan, as they knew nothing of it until the *fait accompli* was cabled through to them in Melbourne. They were, however, sufficiently informed to know that Japan was a friend in the Far East that Britain dearly needed, and some of them may have been struck by the paradox: while they were debating the bill for a white Australia, British officials were negotiating a formal alliance with Japan, unaided, to say the least, by the race fanaticism of the new Commonwealth in the South Seas.

In May 1901 the British colonial secretary, Joseph Chamberlain, warned the Australian government against the adoption of legislation that would openly discriminate against the empire's coloured subjects or antagonise the Japanese. He declared his concern for Japanese sensibilities, telling the

Australians that Japan's feelings should be given 'peculiar force at the present time owing to the position of affairs in the Far East'.⁴

The Japanese were also determined to act pre-emptively. They had been working at this for several years, lobbying in vain to limit the racial scope of colonial legislation in the 1890s. Now, they would launch what Neville Meaney calls 'a two-pronged attack, one prong prodding the Commonwealth government through H. Eitaki, their consul in Sydney, and the other prodding the British through their minister in London, Baron Hayashi Tadasu'.⁵

Eitaki wrote to the Australian prime minister, Edmund Barton, on 3 May 1901, indicating that Japan would take great offence at any legislation that imposed an overt racial or colour test on immigrants. He was adamant that the Japanese were on a higher level of civilisation and morality than other Asian nations. He advised that the Japanese government and population would be insulted if they were lumped together for exclusion with inferior peoples such as the 'Kanakas, Negroes, Pacific Islanders, Indians or other Eastern People'. A fortnight later Baron Hayashi, in London, sought British government assistance to ensure the Australians did not adopt a racially discriminatory migration test. The pressure piled on.⁶

The Bitter Pill

Having in mind both British and Japanese sensitivities, the Australian government chose a method which thinly disguised the purpose of exclusion—a language or dictation test in English, since such a test did not differentiate, at least on the page, between European and non-European countries. But the British were not happy: an English-language test 'was clearly contrary to the policy of equality between all white men', as Chamberlain put it in a telegram to the governor-general in Melbourne. Lord Hopetoun was advised to 'reserve the bill' (to withhold royal assent) should it be passed in this form and, in the meantime, to urge the substitution of a European-language test to be administered at the discretion of a customs officer as the best way to ensure the Australian objective.

Once again, the Australian government complied, reluctantly, and a momentous debate got underway. Drawing on the precedent of earlier colonial legislation aimed at excluding 'coloured aliens', the House was

almost unanimous on the purpose of the Immigration Restriction Bill—that it should be ‘the Declaration for a White Australia’, as Deakin put it.⁷ But beyond this point the matter of compliance with London and the necessity to give ‘peculiar force’ to Japan’s feelings was a source of great resentment and concern. The Commonwealth parliament was compelled to play at disguise, to cloak its noble purpose to suit the British government, or risk censure. It was a bitter pill, and members of the House swallowed it with varying degrees of difficulty. Here, in the foundation debate for a white Australia, we find the predicament, thereafter lost to popular memory—the predicament that would invigorate the nation’s preparation for war and shape the commitment thereafter: distrust of Britain and fear of Japan.⁸

Barton led the debate, noting the bill was now designed to accommodate ‘civilized powers, amongst whom must now be counted Japan’. He conceded the test put the legislators ‘between two fires’—‘the fire of those who wish to make its provisions more drastic and specific; and the fire of those who consider the provisions a piece of organized hypocrisy’. He defended the bill on pragmatic grounds, believing that in its revised form it would succeed, a measure ‘that will be internationally effective and practical amongst ourselves’. His meaning was clear: the bill will satisfy Britain, it will placate Japan and its racial purpose will work. But hardly anyone in the parliament was happy with it. A nation born in ‘organized hypocrisy’ was no cause for celebration.⁹

As leader of the House of Representatives and attorney-general, Deakin was called on to exercise his rhetorical skill to appease all parties (including the Japanese) and see the bill, in its compromised form, through to enactment. He declared the government had ‘no particular love for this method of proceeding’; but, he said, the method was a reasonable request and must be accommodated. The urgency rested in the importance of the objective for, as he put it, the matter of race purity touched upon ‘the profoundest instinct of individual or nation—the instinct of self-preservation...it is nothing less than the national manhood, the national character, and the national future that are at stake.’¹⁰

Deakin digressed, briefly, on Japan’s achievements in the arts, politics and industry. He did so in order to concede as entirely reasonable Japan’s resentment of ‘any unnecessary reflection upon its character’:

When it becomes necessary for us to exclude people like the Japanese it is reasonable that we should exclude them in the most considerate manner possible, and without conveying any idea that we have

confused them with the many uneducated races of Asia and untutored savages who visit our shores. To lump all these people together as Asiatics and undesirables would naturally be offensive to a high-spirited people like the Japanese...Considerations of simple politeness such as honourable members extend to each other in this House, should at least govern the actions of civilized nations in their dealings with one another.

He lamented the necessity for the language test as opposed to explicit racial exclusion but, like Barton, he was ready to compromise in ‘securing this continent for the people of the white race by any means not offensive to other portions of the Empire or foreign powers’. He was certain, too, that the parliamentary record would speak plainly enough to posterity. ‘There will be no mistakes as to our meaning when these speeches are read,’ he declared. To be sure about that, Deakin said it plainly, for the record—which the Japanese consul was monitoring daily. The language test, he said, was specifically intended to ‘exclude alien Asiatics as well as the people of Japan against whom the measure is primarily aimed’.¹¹

The Labor Party was generally supportive of Barton’s government but it thought the language test weak and hypocritical, and led the fight for a straightforward method of racial exclusion—a wording of the bill that would explicitly prohibit the entry of coloured migrants into Australia. The party leader, John Christian (Chris) Watson, painted a vivid picture of a nation in imminent peril: ‘In each and every avenue of life we find the coloured races insidiously creeping in...in the northern parts of Australia, both on the east coast and the west coast we find that coloured people have gained more than a footing—they have practically secured control.’¹²

This imagined north in the grip of unarmed invaders was a theme that animated quite a few members of the parliament—the nation at a pivotal moment, the Asiatic presence a thin edge probing a wedge in the east and the west, the metaphors of ‘creep’ and ‘flood’ and ‘swarm’ busily at work.¹³

Watson spoke of economic apprehensions, notably the threat of cheap ‘heathen’ labour, but his primary concern was ‘racial’:

The objection I have to the mixing of these coloured people with the white people of Australia—although I admit it is to a large extent tinged with considerations of an industrial nature—lies in the main in the possibility and probability of racial contamination...The question is whether we should desire that our sisters or our brothers should be married into any of these races to which we object. If these people are not such as can meet upon an equality, and not such as we can feel that it is no disgrace to intermarry with, and not such as we can expect to give us an infusion of blood that will tend to the raising of our standard of life, and to the improvement of the race, we should be foolish if

we did not exhaust every means of preventing them from coming to this land, which we have made our own.¹⁴

The ‘right to marry’ was never far from the minds of Commonwealth politicians in their long debate on the restrictive bill. There was near unanimity on this key point. When the Labor member for South Melbourne, the Reverend James Ronald, wished to indicate his goodwill towards the coloured races, he felt obliged to observe the perils of race-mixing:

We wish them well; we desire to do them good, but we do not believe that by allowing them to come among us we shall do anything to elevate them. It is just like that which very often happens. Some pure-minded, noble woman marries some degenerate debauchee, with the hope of reclaiming him; but the almost inevitable result is that the man drags her down to his level. So with these inferior races. Even if we go back a considerable time before Christ we find that whenever an inferior race tried to blend with a superior race they dragged the latter down to their own level.¹⁵

The Queensland Labor man James Page was, like most of his colleagues, not inclined to dissemble on the subject:

I am anxious to do all that I can to get rid of these aliens and keep our race pure. Every man knows what happens when coloured races get in among us. They at once bring the white races down to their level, instead of rising to the level of the whites. Those who do raise themselves to the level of the whites get as cunning as foxes, and, notwithstanding our laws and our detective skill, they beat us at every turn. For that reason, if for no other, I would assist any one, no matter what his political opinions were, to rid Australia of the curse.¹⁶

The belief that race-mixing would bring down the white race in Australia, that it would diminish the vigour of the blood, undermine the standard of living and ruin the culture, was pervasive. The advocates of white Australia were inspired by their shared belief that race purity was the vital prerequisite for the anticipated standards and high ideals of the new Commonwealth. These made for good cover—racism was subsumed within nobler objectives.

Some put their case with offensive and extreme language. But racial thinking was occasionally expressed with a degree of sophistication and reserve, Deakin being a case in point. His statements and writings at this time are largely free of hostile prejudice. He chose to emphasise difference and incompatibility, rather than inferiority—at least in the case of Japan. He argued that race was a coherent entity with form of government and civilisation, and thus a merger with another race, another coherent entity, would bring ruination to both. ‘They are separated from us by a gulf which we cannot bridge to the advantage of either,’ he said.¹⁷ Like most of his

constituents he doubted the capacity of people of different races and cultures to live together harmoniously, and there was considerable evidence elsewhere in the world for this opinion, viewed through the prism of race.¹⁸

Deakin eschewed the visceral racism of some of his colleagues in the parliament, but he shared with them the racial associations of the day: freedom and prosperity coupled with superiority and whiteness, and the belief that, should the races mix, the 'lower' would always bring down the 'higher'. His views were shaped in the age of the New Imperialism marked by the European powers' unprecedented pursuit of overseas territorial acquisitions. He thought mixed races unsuitable for constitutional government and fully endorsed 'the higher aspiration for a pure-bred population capable of full citizenship'.¹⁹ The empire, he said, 'is not British in the colour of its subjects, but in the number of its white citizens, who control it, who give it authority, form and weight; whose character and courage sustain it in the day of battle as well as in industrial tasks from hour to hour'.²⁰ Like his mentor Pearson, he understood the interdependence of liberalism and imperialism, of progress and prosperity at home and white-race superiority abroad. And like his fellow advocates, he believed the high ideals of the new Commonwealth hinged on race purity. To intermix and intermarry would bring ruin on the nation.²¹

The high ideals of the young Commonwealth were not unworthy, on the contrary, but a racial solution was believed to be the key to their realisation, the *sine qua non*. Race was much more than one causal factor among others. It was, at that time, a central organising concept of Western intellectual thought and, in Australia, the core principle of identity and national policy. In a bipartisan fashion, race was at the heart of political ideology. Thus, the government led the way, with its resolve anchored in widespread support, as the governor-general, Lord Hopetoun, affirmed. The popular feeling was 'so intense', he told London, 'that I cannot blame my government for having introduced a measure of this kind'.²²

Nor was racism simply a matter of objecting to colour or appearance. Rather, it was the belief that colour or appearance, complexion or the cast of the eyes, were 'inseparably connected' to 'certain qualities of mind' which distinguished one race from another—what Gandhi called 'the deep disease of colour prejudice'—and so positioned the white race above the rest. Cunning, for instance, was a quality of mind that was frequently cited as an

‘Asiatic’ trait: such cunning that they ‘would beat us at every turn’, as Page put it. Deakin had his own, careful variant on this way of thinking:

It is not the bad qualities but the good qualities of these alien races that make them dangerous to us. It is their inexhaustible energy, their power of applying themselves to new tasks, their endurance, and low standard of living that made them such competitors...The effects of the contact of two peoples, such as our own and those constituting the alien races, is not to lift them up to our standard, but to drag our laboring population down to theirs.²³

The one member who spoke eloquently and at length against the bill was Bruce Smith, the Sydney-based free-trader. He summoned the Christian doctrine of common humanity to argue the hypocrisy of preaching Christian principles abroad and then shutting out the same people to whom we preach. He tackled Deakin for advocating exclusion of the Japanese for possessing ‘so many of those old-fashioned virtues’ that Britishers prize. He rejected talk of Chinese living in filthy hovels when many ‘of the lower types of our own race’ lived in terrible slums. He said the bill would be seen to be impractical if ‘we have a due regard to the interests of the empire’. And he argued that the Chinese, the Japanese and the Indian races were purer, racially speaking, than the British race.²⁴

Smith made no headway. The double standard was ever present in the debate. Intelligence, for instance, was clearly as relevant as cunning and what otherwise might have been old-fashioned British virtues were seen to be associated with ‘colour’ and thus alien, defective or unclean. The Labor leader, Watson, was alert to what he understood to be the menace of educated coloured people:

With the Oriental, as a rule, the more he is educated the worse man he is likely to be from our point of view. The more educated, the more cunning he becomes, and the more able, with his peculiar ideas of social and business morality, to cope with people here.

Watson saw no good sense in pretending the legislation was something other than racial in intent. He thought the language test a feeble measure, all too unpredictable in its effects. The smart ones might get through. He thought British objections fraudulent and hypocritical. After all, the British denied rights of citizenship and self-government to their coloured subjects. They ruled the subject races of the empire by virtue of ‘superior intelligence and powers of organization’, and rightly so. Why then should Australia have to treat these people as equals? Watson argued for a bill that spoke

plainly and proudly about white Australia's racial ideals, a bill that would be effective and efficient.²⁵

But he left it to his colleague, Billy Hughes, to launch a full-frontal assault on the influence of Japan in Westminster and the Colonial Office, and Britain's evident desire to please its Japanese friend in the Pacific.

To Be or Not to Be Forsaken

It was Hughes who impressed on his parliamentary colleagues the significance of the moment for a self-governing nation. No longer a gaggle of colonies, but a united federation, clothed with authority to decide its racial future, 'a free people on the very threshold of our national career', as he put it. The right to determine the racial composition of the nation was, in Hughes's opinion, a fundamental right of nationhood.

Hughes's speech is important because it contains the pattern of anxiety that carried through to the First World War. In years to come, Hughes would take over the lead from Deakin, in parliament and in London, in committee rooms and on the soapbox, in peace and in war, to future-proof a white Australia against Japan.

In 1901, he spoke at length on the bitter compromise required by London. If ever in the Commonwealth parliament there was an eloquent speaker who could go, rapier-like, to the heart of a matter, it was Hughes:

If we are to go on making things smooth for His Majesty's Government, if our first and only desire is to shape our policy to fit the ends of the Imperial Government—then ours is not a hopeful future. But if we are to shape a policy to suit our own ends, then we know where we are. We have come, it appears to me, to the parting of the ways.

Hughes's oratory was inclined to lead him to say more than he intended but to speak here of a 'parting of the ways' was consistent, at least for dramatic purposes, with his sense of the occasion, his mastery of overreaction for political effect. He was, as ever, the 'fiery particle'. He was for proceeding in defiance of British advice and contrary to British recommendations, convinced that his own parliament was best placed to decide the right way forward, imbued with that instinct for self-preservation which London would never feel or understand.

An Asian nation dictating policy at the centre of the empire did not bode well for Australia—it was a lesson that Hughes (and Deakin, and others)

took to heart. Sharp as ever, Hughes's 1901 address on the subject identified the rival priorities and competing loyalties at the centre of the debate. It encapsulated the fundamental dilemma facing Australia's leaders. And it offered a portent of the future—the outrageous idea that a new, self-governing parliament of distinguished white men should have to shape their national policy to suit Japan; to suit the very menace they would exclude, *absolutely*, from their land:

Why should we hesitate?...It is notorious that to-day Great Britain stands almost without an ally. She is now driven into a corner, and she is dependent upon the support, tardy and reluctant, of Japan. Amongst all the nations of the world Japan is the only one to support Great Britain...His Majesty's Ministers are reluctant to assent to such a Bill as that desired by the honorable member for Wentworth [McMillan] and the honorable member for Bland [Watson], not because it will offend His Majesty's subjects in India, and not because it will offend the fine susceptibilities or tender feeling of our brothers in Japan, but because it will rob Great Britain of an ally of which in the future she may stand dearly in need. I admit that that is a point which requires consideration. But I say, too, that we are to regard this matter not altogether from the stand-point that the Attorney-General put forward. That is to say, that we may offend somebody at Home by pressing this matter to a conclusion, or that we may offend the nice and tender susceptibilities of the Japanese, or that we may annoy the Eastern nations generally; but we are to consider the question as to how it will affect us as a free people on the very threshold of our national career...The only argument in favour of our stopping short is that if we go on we shall offend the Japanese or annoy and embarrass His Majesty's Ministers...These things, however, are not to be considered when opposed to the great principle that the Attorney-General himself has so well and admirably voiced...We want a white Australia, and are we to be denied it because we shall offend the Japanese or embarrass His Majesty's Ministers? I think not.

Hughes went on to conjure the 'terrible blot' afflicting America and the 'leprous curse' of the far north of Queensland, a curse which threatened 'to make the country no longer fit for a white man'.²⁶

Labor's case for a bill that spoke plainly of the true purpose of the legislation was narrowly defeated on 26 September 1901.²⁷ But there were some members who voted against the amendment on purely tactical grounds—to avoid ructions with London, to secure royal assent of the legislation without further trouble and to save more embarrassment to Britain. A clear majority of the parliament would have preferred plain-speaking, a bill that unashamedly declared its commitment to the racial ideal in defiance of London.²⁸

Other members took up this theme and there were numerous variations upon it. James Hume Cook, one of Deakin's associates, declared the method of exclusion not exactly palatable to himself 'and it certainly is not palatable to a large section, if not the whole, of the honourable members of this house.' He wanted explicit prohibition, racial exclusion in a

‘straightforward manner’. He wanted to challenge London on the vital question of who is ‘best able to say what is proper for Australia’. The Irish-born barrister Paddy Glynn, the member for Angas, said Chamberlain wanted Australia to be his ‘catpaw’ in the service of not offending ‘Japanese susceptibilities’ because Japan was ‘now armed to a point which entitles them to some consideration among the nations of the world’. Another free-trader, the Orangeman William Henry Wilks, rounded on Deakin’s duplicity, declaring the Japanese would see through the ‘subterfuge’—they would be more offended by the test than by the ‘straight-out course’ recommended by Watson.²⁹

Deakin’s former university pal and debating-club colleague Henry Bournes Higgins was also critical.³⁰ Like Deakin, he believed it was the ‘good qualities’ of the Japanese that made them so dangerous, but he wanted the parliament and the bill to ‘speak out straightforwardly’ and he would not accept dictation from London. He summoned something of the spirit of masculine defiance, the assertive insistence on manhood that ran through much of the debate. ‘Are we to be hampered and told from another part of the world what is best for us...Are we to be treated as schoolboys or men? Are we to look after the interests of Australia or to subordinate those interests to the interests of the old country?’³¹

William McMillan was the deputy leader of the free-traders in the parliament. He felt obliged to tell the House he was prepared to follow the example of America if Britain ever placed the interests of India, and presumably Japan, over those of Australia in relation to immigration. Not bad for a dyed-in-the-wool imperial conservative. He seconded Watson’s amendment, calling the indirect method of exclusion a ‘crooked measure’. The momentousness of the occasion was not lost on him. The nation was, he said, ‘beginning an experiment in government which...has no parallel in the civilized world’. And yet, he said, ‘We are told we must cover up our real intentions in this Bill.’³²

The Reverend James Ronald declared his preference for ‘honesty’ and put a familiar case against Japanese standards, insisting that ‘the worst class of men we have to fear are the educated aliens.’ He told the House that the colonial secretary must be made to ‘understand that the people of Australia are not a people who go in for circumlocution’.³³

One of Deakin’s good friends in the House was Richard Crouch, another student of Pearson’s *National Life and Character* and a believer in the

coming race war. He spoke to perhaps the deepest fear in the hearts of those political leaders who had long experience of the friction between Britain's global priorities and its Pacific policy. The question that Deakin and Hughes and like-minded others would carry into the troubling years ahead was implicit in Crouch's address:

To speak straight out was once the British way of doing things, and it is extraordinary that we Britishers cannot speak out as we ought to do and as we used to do. It strikes me that the British Empire has fallen very low indeed when we cannot say straight out what sort of men we desire within the Empire. It is very humiliating when we find that it is necessary to temporize with other nations in order to secure some temporary trade advantage. That is really what this means. So far as the Imperial Government is concerned it is not a question of manhood or race in the same way as it is with us, but purely a question of trade. England wants the support of Japan in her trade policy in China, and in order to get it she is ready to sacrifice us—that is assuming that this Bill would be vetoed rather than that offence should be given to Japan. It has been stated that this Bill might be vetoed; but, on the other hand, that although it might be very painful to His Majesty the King he would assent to it, and I think that we ought to do what is right at all costs. We shall make a very great mistake if owing to fear of the veto we are prevented from doing what we consider to be necessary to preserve the purity of the white race in Australia.³⁴

The question of whether under certain circumstances Britain might be 'ready to sacrifice us', as Crouch put it, was also broached by Deakin. In his speech of 9 October 1901, he went to some trouble to convince his fellow parliamentarians, and perhaps himself, that the British government had always tried hard not to sacrifice the security interests of Australia in the pursuit of imperial priorities elsewhere. But we know this was not Deakin's view. He had a far more jaundiced sense of British assurances and of recent history. As much in hope as conviction he told the House: 'We must be satisfied that if we have adopted a particular course out of consideration for the wishes of the statesmen who are charged with the future destinies and foreign relations of that Empire, we shall not be forsaken.'³⁵

The Sentinel

‘When the Empire is engaged in a death grip with Russia or some other power, what will become of Australia?’

Billy Hughes, *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, 21 July 1903

Throughout the busy months of 1901 when the Commonwealth’s parliamentarians were debating the finer points of the Immigration Restriction Bill, Japanese officials in London, Sydney and Melbourne kept up the barrage of protests they had begun as the debate got underway.

At the outset, in May 1901, they argued that any bill which explicitly nominated the coloured races as its target would give great offence, by lumping the Japanese with ‘inferior peoples’ from other parts of Asia. Under pressure from the Colonial Office in London, the Australian government complied, substituting the European language test, a thin disguise given the bluntness of the debate to come.

The Japanese consul, H. Eitaki, was well established in the Australian scene, having held the role since 1898. His is the only Asian face in Tom Roberts’ vast painting of the inauguration of the Commonwealth. From the outset, Eitaki was a relentless critic of the immigration bill, an acute observer of parliamentary proceedings with a sensitive ear for racial language.

He wrote regularly to Barton to express his personal distress and the distress of his government in Tokyo. He was ‘puzzled and disturbed’ by Deakin’s speech. The Japanese, it seemed, were to be excluded ‘because of their good points’: Deakin had declared them the most dangerous of Asian

peoples. Nor was Eitaki content with the subterfuge of the language test, for it would tend, he argued, to place the Japanese on a lower level than the Turks, Russians or Greeks. The Japanese did not see themselves as that low. When the bill finally passed into law, Eitaki did not relent. He sought the assistance of the governor-general, complaining that the test was 'racial pure and simple'.

In London the Japanese 'resident minister', Baron Hayashi, was pursuing a similar course to his diplomatic colleague, who was based in Sydney but frequently in Melbourne. Eitaki's letters and cables kept him more or less up-to-date. In London, Hayashi was pitching for equal membership in the comity of great nations, he and his colleagues in Japan driven by their own powerful sense of national honour and racial pride, and their belief that progress at home must go hand in hand with expansion to the West.¹ Hayashi observed the clear racial intent of the Australian bill and appealed to the British to 'induce the Government of Australia to so modify these clauses as to place Japanese subjects on the same footing with those of European nationalities'. Alluding to the secret alliance negotiations, he professed himself anxious 'to remove the obstacles in the way'. Even when news of the bill passing into law—at the close of 1901—reached London he persisted, citing passages from Barton's and Deakin's speeches, describing them as 'monstrous declarations' and 'quite unfair to one of the friendliest nations with the United Kingdom'.

Hayashi twice tried to persuade the British government to withhold the assent of the governor-general, but Chamberlain was not prepared to intervene in the process yet again. He warned that disallowance might result in the Commonwealth adopting 'an even more drastic measure'. Given the mood of the parliament, this was a conceivable outcome should London abuse the constitutional autonomy of the new nation and further interfere with its pursuit of the racial ideal.²

Chamberlain recognised that the Australian intransigence might offend the Japanese but it would not scuttle the alliance-in-the-making. To become Britain's ally meant a tremendous gain for Japan, entry into the community of big powers. Beside that advance, the Australian legislation was a minor irritant.³ The Anglo-Japanese alliance was signed on 8 February 1902 and promptly thereafter the British foreign secretary advised Japan that Britain was unable to further influence Australia to amend or dispense with its racial legislation.

The Australian government was equally prompt, declaring its support for the alliance. The suspicions stirred by Japanese attempts to influence the legislation were countered by the evident advantages, if temporary, that Australian politicians saw in the mutual support proffered by Japan at a time of great stress for the British nation and the empire. For the time being, Australians might enjoy the best of both worlds: the Japanese people were banished from their land along with all other 'Asiatics', while the Japanese nation—modern, 'clean', 'artful', 'civilised'—was allied to Britain in the service of the empire, a vital counterweight to the Russian threat in the North Pacific. And the British navy still held sway on the oceans of the world, if not quite as it once had.

The Japanese, as immigrants, might take the nation down by way of 'race pollution', but the Anglo-Japanese alliance presented no such problems. When finally informed of the alliance, Australia's political leaders welcomed it, keeping their misgivings to themselves. Barton expressed his 'satisfaction' with the new development. He stressed the immigration policy was in no way compromised and from a defence point of view it was, he said, 'more beneficial than otherwise'. As the alliance placed the empire in a stronger position, it would diminish risks of rupture with other powers and consequently, he argued, there was nothing in the treaty that would 'increase the risk of attack on Australia'. All three major parties in the new parliament agreed, publicly at least.⁴

In these circumstances, when a Japanese naval squadron visited Australia in May and June of 1903 the general public were free to pursue their curiosity and be generous in their welcome.

The squadron numbered six hundred officers and men under the command of Admiral Kamimura. After a brief visit to Perth the visitors were welcomed in Adelaide, before going on to Melbourne and Sydney. On each occasion, the visitors were feted by local dignitaries. The press welcomed the squadron as allies and Pacific neighbours, and vast crowds congregated on shorelines to study the new arrivals. The visit was marked by the warmth of the popular welcome and the lavish hospitality of city elites. The Japanese were treated as if they were honorary Anglo-Saxons.⁵

In Melbourne, the *Hashidate* was open for inspection and people went by launch to explore the Japanese warship. Official visitors included the prime minister, Edmund Barton; his minister for defence, Sir John Forrest; and the Victorian premier, William Irvine. Newspapers reported on the first-rate

performance of the Japanese brass band; on the impressive deportment of the officers and the men, their ‘intelligence and manners’; and on the formidable hardware they commanded, notably the big guns and state-of-the-art wireless telegraphy.⁶

The *Sydney Morning Herald* headline announced ‘Our Japanese Guests’, and the column told readers that Japan and Australia had a common interest in the Pacific which could draw them closer in the years to come. Only the *Sydney Mail* exhibited a note of caution: ‘Clean-limbed and nattily dressed they created an openly and warmly expressed feeling of admiration in the minds of many who have not yet been able to realise that Japan is well up in the front of the great naval powers of the world.’⁷

This was a fascinating observation. The *Mail* seemed to be suggesting that ignorance underpinned admiration. Worldly men of affairs, it implied, were not to be swayed by brass bands and good manners, presumably because they understood the danger of this new ‘great naval power’. And yet, there was no urgency in the caution. The alliance, while drawing attention to the formidable power of Japan, also afforded Australia breathing space.⁸

But globally the threats were many, and the worldly men of affairs in the first Commonwealth parliament were alive to them. In the debates on defence over the period 1901–03 more than half the speakers declared some fear for the immediate future. The Boer War (1899–1902) had undermined British moral authority at home and abroad, while the great powers’ intervention in China during the Boxer Rebellion (1900–01) hardened the view that the ‘storm centre’ of the world was shifting to a Pacific now caught in a web of empires.⁹

The Australian government accepted the view provided by British authorities in 1902—the Admiralty view—that Russia posed the greatest threat to Australian and imperial interests in the Pacific.¹⁰ This important piece of intelligence helps to explain how the parliament that had so readily insulted the Japanese in the course of its immigration-restriction debate was able to accept the Anglo–Japanese alliance. Australia’s leaders had responded to the alliance as loyal members of the empire—emotional loyalties moderating racial fears—but they also responded pragmatically to the apparent reality of the Russian menace in the Far East and the North Pacific. As Barton put it in 1903: ‘In the present position of affairs, Japan as

a Power is of even more interest to all who revolt from the idea of submitting to Russian arrogance!’¹¹

Reviewing foreign-policy opinion in the first Commonwealth parliament reveals a shared sense of insecurity about Australia’s geographical location in the world, some grasp of Britain’s limits and a widely shared belief that dangers lay ahead—yet very different points of view about the most likely source of trouble, whether from Europe or Asia. More than half the members of the first parliament spoke on defence or defence-related matters, some declaring their concern over the mighty Russian fleet in the North Pacific—sixty-nine vessels off the coast of China—and some preferring to emphasise the dangers posed, now or in time to come, by Eastern nations.

Along with race purity and tariff protection, defence was the third great question facing the new Commonwealth. The government was required to formulate a defence bill that would bring together the forces hitherto maintained by the colonies, set out the structure of the consolidated army and confirm the conditions under which these forces could be deployed. It was also required to renew the naval agreement of 1887, whereby a Royal Navy squadron of elderly and second-rate vessels was maintained in Australian waters in return for a subsidy of £106,000 per annum, a hefty claim on a revenue-poor Commonwealth.¹²

Defence for the Nation

As the parliamentary debate progressed it soon became apparent that senior officers in the military and their new commander, Major-General E. T. H. Hutton, were Chamberlain’s voice in Melbourne. They recommended a component of the armed forces be specifically designed, trained and ready for imperial service anywhere that the empire might need them. They called this component the Imperial Reserve. There were other terms bandied about—‘mobile field force’, ‘war reserve’ and ‘expeditionary force’—but these all meant the same thing: an army ready for imperial service anywhere, at the behest of London. The critics in the Commonwealth parliament could not agree, arguing that Australia’s peculiar vulnerability in the far South Pacific meant an imperial reserve was out of the question, as was any form of imperial control over the land forces.

But Hutton was nothing if not a determined instrument of empire. He had served in Africa, Egypt, Canada and New South Wales before his appointment as general officer commanding the land forces of the Commonwealth in January 1902. He was a celebrant of the incomparable virtues of the Anglo-Saxon race and, in his own words, ‘a very humble instrument of an all-wise Providence’. Not surprisingly, he was convinced of his own wisdom, the provenance being impeccable.

Hutton took as his brief the integration and equipping of a garrison and field force ready for service at home and abroad, and argued hard for a defence act with a provision for compulsory overseas military service in time of war. He did not get his way, and two years after his arrival he departed, beaten. But in the interim, he put up quite a fight.¹³

He shared the Colonial Office view that the Pacific sensitivities of Australian politicians were quite unnecessary and, being narrow and insular, they failed to understand that the defence of empire anywhere was the defence of empire everywhere. He was advised by Chamberlain to regard himself as ‘the servant of the Australian government’ and to never appear to be the instrument of London. And yet he was required to be precisely that—to ensure that a clause enabling Australian forces to be sent abroad was included in the defence act. He promised the war secretary that he would do all in his power to raise a force of twenty thousand mounted troops which could be employed as an imperial reserve as required by the exigencies of empire.

Hutton was well aware of Australian political leaders’ peculiar anxieties about Asia and saw an opportunity to deploy these anxieties to his own ends. His wording was crucial. He proposed the field force be available for service ‘wherever Australian interests were threatened’. His minute on Australia’s defence needs composed in April 1902 confirmed the old idea that the nation’s geographical isolation made it ‘less liable to aggression from any foreign power than most parts of the Empire’. But it also raised the possibility of an ‘Eastern menace’: ‘The rapid and continuous improvements in steam and telegraph communications have now destroyed the former isolation of Australia, and modern developments in the East have brought the States of the Commonwealth upon the arena of the Old-world strife.’

Hutton listed a catalogue of new developments: Japan becoming an ‘armed power of the first magnitude’; Russian ambitions in China; the

United States established in the Philippines, Guam and Samoa; Germany established in the Solomons and New Guinea. In short, the Pacific was a new arena of contention. Australia was no longer immune from the troubles of the world and a 'broad policy' of defence was required, a field force available for use at the British government's discretion. The major-general's conclusion positioned the notion of national defence in close proximity to British requirements: Australia should be willing, he argued, to defend not simply the continental landmass but also the 'vast interests beyond her shores upon the maintenance of which her present existence and her future prosperity must so largely depend'.¹⁴

There were politicians in the cabinet and the parliament who could see the good sense of this argument, but the government and the majority of parliamentarians were not persuaded. Hutton was obliged to tell the War Office that Australia rejected the idea of an imperial reserve and jealously retained the right to decide, on every occasion, where its troops might go. The administrative foundations he laid were long-lasting but, on vital matters of national versus imperial strategy, he would fail.¹⁵

At the Colonial Conference in London in 1902 the discussion was renewed, Barton and Forrest representing the Commonwealth. In the wake of the Boer War, the necessity to rethink a collective defence for the empire was high on the agenda. Joseph Chamberlain employed a dramatic if familiar symbolism for the benefit of delegates from the self-governing colonies: 'The Weary Titan staggers under the too vast orb of its fate,' he told them. London wanted the colonies to bear a greater share of the burden of the 'too vast orb'. The delegates were advised 'that the defence of the empire had to be taken as a whole, that the totality of its white manpower should be available for the protection of any part, that it was necessary to prepare in peacetime for united action in war, and that the colonies should make provision in their defence establishments for special contingents for imperial service'. The War Office memorandum paid no heed to the Australians' geographical concerns, insisting 'That the supreme authority, which is responsible for the defence of the Empire as a whole, should be able to rely with certainty on colonial contingents of definite strength, being available for defensive or offensive operations in any part of the world.'¹⁶

Barton was not unsympathetic to the principle involved here. Like many Australians he thought it a matter of self-respect that the able-bodied men of the nation should volunteer for Britain's wars in return for the security

that Australia enjoyed under the cover of British prestige in the world and the protection of the Royal Navy. The quid pro quo was a simple moral equation, but compulsion was another matter. Barton knew that compulsion would be howled down in the Commonwealth parliament by the majority, what Governor-General Lord Hopetoun had called ‘the inferior kind of politicians out here’.¹⁷

Barton told the gathered delegates at the Colonial Conference that Australia would not fail the empire in a time of peril, but public opinion would not permit the kind of carte blanche the War Office wanted. He assured the gathered officials and delegates from around the world that a commitment tendered freely was much preferred, thus making a sentimental gesture out of national defiance.

If the terms under which the white manpower of the empire might be mobilised were controversial, the naval agreement was even more so. Britain proposed an arrangement whereby the Australian subsidy would almost double, to two hundred thousand pounds per annum, in return for a British undertaking to maintain a much larger squadron in Australian waters, but without the former commitment to remain at all times in the Australasian sphere. Australia’s first line of defence was to be bigger and better but available for service anywhere in the Pacific or Indian oceans in time of need.

The proposition did not please Barton, nor would it please the public or the politicians at home, particularly as the argument for an exclusively Australian navy was already drawing favourable comment within and without the parliament. And the Commonwealth was in no position, financially, to embark on such an endeavour. In the short term, the only option seemed to Barton to be compliance, though he well knew he would face a storm of protest once home. The squadron’s sphere was now widened to cover the waters of Australia, China and the East Indies. The relevant clause stipulated that the ships might go ‘where the Admiralty believes they can most effectively act against hostile vessels which threaten the trade or interests of Australia and New Zealand’.¹⁸

As anticipated, the arrangement did not please the men of the Commonwealth parliament who believed the authorities in London had no appreciation of Australia’s peculiarly isolated and perilous circumstances—the authorities who mistook deeply felt anxieties for mere debating-club sentiment. The naval agreement was perhaps a *fait accompli* but a second

defence bill was now in draft form, having been drawn up at government request by Major-General Hutton, who was compelled to accept that ‘neither an imperial reserve nor imperial control were as such feasible options.’ But he was not inclined to relent. He was driven to find another way to ensure that Australian troops would serve the empire whenever and wherever required. To that end he drafted a bill which retained the concept of a ‘field force’, and which asserted the Commonwealth’s right to send troops abroad in a ‘national emergency’ and for the ‘defence of Australian interests generally’.¹⁹

Hutton’s labours came to naught. The sticking point stuck and the legislation was fashioned for a national defence in place of an imperial mandate, what Hughes would insist was ‘home defence—for home defence only’. The key principles in the legislation stipulated: the pre-eminent role of the citizen army; a prohibition on raising any permanent military force, except for administrative and instruction staff; a fighting force to be raised by voluntary enlistment only; an element of compulsion—a levy en masse in the case of invasion; and, finally, two key clauses—section 48, a prohibition on the use of the military forces overseas, and section 49, which decreed that members of the forces could not be compelled to serve beyond the Commonwealth or its territories.

It was a defence act that would profoundly influence the political choices available to the key players in the five years before war began in 1914, and thereafter.²⁰ It was a defence act for the nation, not the empire.

As if to test the will of the government, the War Office sent a curious enquiry to Hutton in February of 1904, in the final stages of the long and much-interrupted debate over the defence bill. The letter was from Sir Ian Hamilton, who would, in 1915, command the imperial forces at Gallipoli. Hamilton, like Hutton, was a veteran of imperial endeavour on several continents, and he was about to lead a military observer mission with the Japanese armies in the Far East. He thought them fine allies. He said they would be deadly enemies. He told Hutton that ‘the Japanese would like the co-operation of some of our fellows in Manchuria—especially cavalry.’ He had suggested to the War Council that ‘Australia might easily send three to four thousand mounted men, who would be more than a match for twice their number of Cossacks.’²¹

Hutton was compelled to reply to Hamilton in the negative. Given the nature of parliamentary opinion and the shape of the defence bill, there was

little point in trying to persuade the government to raise a mercenary force *in peacetime* to fight for Japan in the Far East. He discussed the idea with Deakin, who was now prime minister—the same politician who had so forcefully argued that the Japanese were the most dangerous of all Asians. Deakin would not entertain the proposal. As attorney-general under Barton he had supported the shaping of the defence bill to national priorities. Now, as leader, he was not about to send Australian horsemen to fight Russian Cossacks on the steppes of Manchuria.

In place of a contingent of mounted volunteers, Deakin sent just one man, a military attaché with two complementary duties—to assist the Japanese where possible and to observe Japanese forces in action. Hutton resigned soon after, his final report full of dark premonitions of the dangers pressing down on Australia and the nation's ill-preparedness to deal with them.

The Fiery Particle

On the subject of ill-preparedness there was one parliamentarian who, throughout the debates on the defence bill and the naval agreement, was given to his own dark premonitions. He proceeded not from this objection or that but from a carefully formulated and thought-out policy for the long-term salvation of the nation, a rock-solid philosophy of all life as ruthless struggle. That parliamentarian was Billy Hughes, sentinel, prophet, race fanatic and torchbearer for preparedness.

Hughes owed far more to Hobbes and Social Darwinism than he did to the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. He thought democracy a fragile thing, imperilled by its virtues. He saw the world as a racial battlefield, and the cut and thrust of imperial rivalry as an ever-present threat to Australia. He thought the natural conditions of humankind were inherently violent, and the relations between nation states nothing but war and conquest punctuated by occasional interludes.²²

In the first few years of the national parliament, Hughes saw no imminent danger but many possible dangers, emanating from Europe and Asia. He believed that the British navy was stretched thin and could not be counted on with absolute certainty. Should it suffer a setback or be withdrawn from the Pacific, Australia would be isolated and at the mercy of any predatory

power. Hughes was for seizing the moment, for getting ready, for laying the foundations for a national defence force. He was ever thus.

Hughes denounced the first defence bill with the kind of sarcasm he would summon in peacetime and in wartime, in his crusade against the Japanese for the defence of white Australia. He could see no merit in the bill. He thought the minister, Sir John Forrest, incompetent:

It is a matter on which we may heartily congratulate ourselves that the discovery of gunpowder was made prior to the Minister's time, otherwise I am firmly persuaded that he would have been an ardent advocate of the primitive bow and arrow. He seems absolutely to belong to the Neolithic or prehistoric period, to have dwelt in a cave of his own—hitherto successfully keeping out any crawling or prowling marauder, and now, whether driven out or simply crawling out of his own accord, he obtrudes ideas admirably adapted to the cave into the more extended sphere of federal life.²³

Hughes exposed the shortcomings. There was no provision regarding obsolete weapons and no provision for the abolition of the 'tinsel and glitter of military life', for a much preferred spartan simplicity of uniform and habit; worse still, the bill provided for a military establishment on a permanent footing, an establishment that was not sufficiently strong to repel an invader but surely strong enough to imperil democracy, civil liberty and rights if push came to shove.

Hughes wanted neither a defence based on a permanent military force nor a volunteer arrangement but, instead, a national militia modelled on the Swiss system, with training enough for men to understand discipline and the skills required to fight efficiently in a purely defensive citizen army. He was not alone, at this stage in the nation's life, in his belief in universal training; but he was almost alone among his parliamentary colleagues and the people of his own party. No matter. Aloneness never rattled Hughes's self-belief nor his sense of purpose, particularly with respect to race purity and defence. As his biographer Laurie Fitzhardinge observes, Hughes's perspective was more than strategic—it was vital for the national psyche:

If Australia was to take her place as a democratic nation, and especially if she was to adopt, as he believed she must, such potentially challenging policies as White Australia, her people must be prepared to defend themselves and, as a last resort, to rely on themselves alone.²⁴

Unlike all other leaders in the parliament at this time, Hughes refused to rule out the possibility of invasion or some catastrophe whereby great powers might partition Australia. He spoke of the vast coast, the island continent, a fundamental reality for defence planning, a reality not

acknowledged in the bill; of the framers apparently unaware that matters of land defence must be considered in concert with matters naval and the naval-agreement bill, for the latter needed amendment as desperately as the defence bill needed rethinking.

Hughes argued that the naval agreement was deeply flawed, the squadron obsolete and the deal a bad one: the moneys so far spent might have purchased a navy! Even before the new terms were drafted into legislative form, he knew the hard truth—that empire priorities would, in extremis, prevail over Australian needs:

It must be borne in mind that we have by no means the exclusive right to these cruisers. We have only the first call, which, in a time of danger, would become the last call. There is no sort of doubt whatever in the minds of any reasonable men that when the hour strikes that the Empire of Great Britain shall really be in danger, not from a handful of farmers [the Boers], but from an assault by a great and powerful combination of the nations, the auxiliary squadron will be detailed perhaps to China or elsewhere, to guard the places where the Empire is naturally most vulnerable to attack.

Hughes was prepared to concede that so long as Great Britain held command of the seas, Australia would be safe. But the moment that command faltered, Australia would be in peril. He insisted this was no ‘chimerical’ idea, for recent history confirmed the danger. He was, clearly, a student of European imperialism. He noted how Britain had plucked India, how the great powers had carved up Africa and how they were contending now to share out the spoils of China:

If we asked ourselves what has been the history of the last 50 years, we should find that it has been a sharing of the spoils of the weaker nations amongst the great powers of Europe. We have seen India fall like a ripe plum into the hands of Great Britain; we have seen spheres of influence extended into protectorates, protectorates extended into colonies, and colonies extended into empires and nations. We have seen, and we continue to see, day after day this process of eating up the unoccupied or *weakly defended* portions of the world, and are we to suppose that if ever Great Britain’s power is broken one of the first and primal things that will occur to the nations will not be a division of the spoils of that empire? Will not India fall into the hands of that nation whose claws are the most powerful and whose might is the most resistless? As a matter of fact, does any man believe that Australia—since she has elected to take the part, for good or for ill, of standing by the mother-land—will ever be permitted to stand out as though she were an indifferent factor, entirely unconnected with the great British Empire?²⁵

He was not alone in his criticism of the bill, for other speakers had picked at its deficiencies, but he alone expounded a holistic vision of the menace of the world situation and the essentials needed to meet that menace and prevail.

After a long and exhaustive debate, the first defence bill was withdrawn, to be reintroduced in later months in a much-improved form. The 'fiery particle' did not get his compulsory military training scheme, but the second bill did reflect Hughes's security concerns and it carried the mark of the national priorities that his speeches had stirred into prominence, notably the 'citizen forces', and the permanent personnel not to be compelled to serve outside Australia and command of those forces firmly with the Australian government of the day, not with London.

Almost two years later to the day, on 21 July 1903, Hughes rose in the House to address the subject of the naval-agreement bill. Barton had defended the agreement in a carefully prepared speech, appealing to the moderate cost of the subsidy considered per head (way cheaper than Argentina!) and to the principle of collective support for the empire. The reception was mixed at best, speakers from all parties expressing their unease, one member suggesting that what was formerly a provision for an Australian squadron was now a tribute to the general naval strength of the empire.

Hughes spoke at length, late in the debate. He agreed with other speakers on the vital difference between this agreement and that of 1887: 'The squadron is to be no longer under our control, and the sphere of its operations is to be extended to the China and East Indies stations.' He spoke of an empire stretched too thin, too avaricious for its own good, compelled to rely on 'embarrassing alliances' (Japan) and burdened by the cost of an ill-considered imperialism, 'spurred on by those insatiate ones, who are never satisfied unless she [Britain] is grabbing fresh portions of empire'.

He spoke of his deep fears for a nation that relied so heavily on the protective embrace of the Royal Navy, that paid tribute for this protection and yet had no say in the deployment of the so-called Australian squadron, let alone in the affairs of the empire:

The Imperial authorities may extend her territories, they may enter, as they have done, into embarrassing alliances, they may declare war, or may become involved in a war, and in connexion with none of these steps have we the right to say one word. We cannot control one constituency in the Parliament which directs the affairs of the Empire, nor can we in any way, excepting by protest... influence the councils of the Empire.

What distinguishes Hughes from all other members of the parliament, if only by degree, is his sense of an empire remorselessly committed to

expansion and, with every increment, less able to look after its parts:

Ours is an Empire which is forever growing. It has during the last fifteen years increased its territory by 33 per cent. There has been hardly a month, and certainly not a year within the last decade or quarter of a century, if not within the last 50 years, in which Great Britain has not been engaged in war. In one place or another, the British have been either seeking fresh fields or defending possessions which they have already obtained. As the Empire is always growing, war is a condition apparently natural and even inevitable. Under these circumstances, when the day comes, as it inevitably will, when the struggle for the world's supremacy will be waged between Great Britain and Russia, or some other power or combination of powers, it will be a struggle to the death.

Russia in particular, with its war fleet of sixty-nine vessels off the coast of China, had focussed his mind:

When the Empire is engaged in a death grip with Russia or some other power, what will become of Australia? When that day comes, not one vessel of the Imperial Squadron can be spared for local defence, and our shores will then be defenceless, and exposed to the attacks of raiding cruisers, unless we are prepared to defend them ourselves. Yet it is calmly proposed by this agreement to remove the local Imperial fleet now stationed here, and—though not in so many words—to give the deathblow to the budding aspirations for an Australian Navy. As to the cost of such a navy I say nothing; that is a question for experts. But no matter what it costs, we must have it if it be necessary.

Hughes wanted an Australian navy and compulsory military training for a citizens' army. He wanted a national defence policy which recognised the hard truth—that, post-Boer War, the British empire was beleaguered and overstretched by the 'insatiate ones', and that a crisis in some strategically vital part of the empire could lead to Australia being abandoned.²⁶

These were the sentiments that would guide Hughes's struggle up to and into the First World War, and on to the Paris Peace Conference at Versailles. For Russia, though, read Japan.

The Perfect Storm

‘Japan has shown she is an aggressive nation. She has shown that she is desirous of pushing out all around. What has always been the effect of victory and of conquest upon nations? Do we not know that it stimulates them to further conflict? To obtain fresh territories? Has not that been the history of our own race?...Is there any other country that offers such a temptation to Japan as Australia does?’

Senator George Pearce, *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, 22 November 1905

In May 1905, a white nation was vanquished for the first time in the modern era by a ‘coloured’ nation. A Japanese flotilla under Admiral Togo destroyed Russia’s Baltic fleet in the Tsushima Strait in less time than it took Nelson to win the Battle of Trafalgar, or so the Sydney *Evening News* told its readers.¹ Later in the same year the Anglo–Japanese alliance was renewed. Soon after, the British withdrew their capital ships from the Pacific to strengthen their position vis-à-vis Germany in the North Sea. Henceforth they relied on Japan to safeguard British interests in the so-called Far East—the Near North to Australia.²

Australia’s political leaders, for the most part, were of one mind on the new situation: in the absence of a significant British presence in the Pacific, the nation was no longer secure. They had awakened to the menace of Japan, to a sudden vulnerability, and nothing would ever be the same. The year 1905 had delivered a perfect storm. Their fears ‘attained an intensity

without precedent in the nation's history', writes Neville Meaney in his monumental study *The Search for Security in the Pacific, 1901–14*.³

Australia's political leaders were haunted by more than proximity to Japan and distance from Britain. They were haunted by a suspicion that Britain might abandon them in their hour of need, an anxiety that soured political and diplomatic relations from this point. From here on, Australia's relationship to Britain, at the highest levels, was marked as much by fear of abandonment as it was by imperial solidarity.

Any lingering complacency evaporated. And whatever solace Australia's leaders had formerly taken from the Anglo–Japanese alliance was now diminished. The defeat of the Russian navy was a stunning achievement, marking a dramatic shift in the global balance of power. It announced a new and unrivalled military force in the Pacific, an unchecked Asian power to Australia's north. Leaders within the Commonwealth parliament refused to be cheered by the alliance. On the contrary, they feared Japanese leverage in London might threaten their immigration laws; they feared Australia might be forced to receive Japanese immigrants, the incremental undoing of the nation's race purity.

They worried the Japanese would sooner or later push south; they sensed their fragile hold on a vast land and they feared invasion, miscegenation, the iron fist of an ambitious race and the ruin of white Australia, which they cherished as a positive ideal, the defining principle of the nation and the vital prerequisite for progress, for the upward social evolution that would guarantee the unity and the prosperity of the new Commonwealth.

They declared themselves uneasy, some astonished, that their defence was now contracted out to a coloured nation with expansionist ambitions. They thought the Anglo–Japanese alliance, inevitably, a temporary thing. They worried about how quickly things could change, come apart. They were haunted by the race fears of generations, a haunting that now seemed well grounded in real-world experience.⁴

Deakin's Clarion Call

Alfred Deakin recognised the seismic shock that Japan had delivered to the balance of world power and he was anxious to alert the people of Australia to the new situation. He gathered his thoughts. Two weeks after the Japanese triumph, he provided the Melbourne *Herald* with an interview in

which he declared a new age, the end of an era of relative peace. Not since Napoleonic times had the world been so disrupted, and never before had Australia been in such peril.

He noted the rise of three new naval powers—Germany, Japan and the United States. He identified various foreign naval stations now based in the Pacific, but his primary concern was Japan: ‘Japan is the nearest of all the great foreign naval stations to Australia. Japan at her headquarters is, so to speak, next door, while the Mother Country is many streets away, and connected by long [vulnerable] lines of communication.’⁵

In Deakin’s view, Japan’s strategic ascendancy was as undeniable as the forthcoming withdrawal of British battleships from the Pacific. His carefully prepared remarks were his clarion call for a national defence. Australia must have its own navy. Now he agreed with Billy Hughes—the nation must have a compulsory military training scheme too. His words did not go unheeded. They had precisely the effect he had hoped for: to rally public opinion and to rouse politicians to the cause.

Reticence readily gave way to declarations of concern. Allan McLean, who was briefly deputy prime minister in the second parliament, was quick to follow Deakin. He said Australians must awaken

to the fact that we have been living in a fool’s paradise, when we have assumed that our great distance from the military nations gave us immunity from foreign invasion... We now find one of the great naval and military powers within a very short distance of our shores. That puts us in a very different position from that which we considered we occupied before.⁶

McLean thought it fortunate the Japanese were tied into an alliance with Britain but that, he noted, could easily change.

The Labor leader, Chris Watson, declared he now understood that ‘developments to the North, colloquially known as the Far East’ required Australia to populate the land with good, solid Anglo-Saxon stock, or perish. He thought China and Japan sufficiently busy in the Western Pacific to allow Australia some breathing space, but Australians must make use of that time, to ready themselves.⁷

Senator George Pearce was another Labor man who was converted from his anti-militarist inclinations as the Russo–Japanese war ran its course. A carpenter by trade, a blacksmith’s son, like so many working men who went into the new parliament he was immensely able if lacking in formal education, having left school aged eleven. Late in 1905, now thirty-five, he

told the Senate it would be foolish to regard the Anglo–Japanese alliance as any kind of ‘guarantee for all time’ because of Japan’s ‘aggressive’ outlook and the temptation Australia posed.⁸

The reading public was awakened too. Voluntary organisations were formed to mobilise public opinion and pressure well-placed politicians to act. The urgency was not assuaged by the renewal of the Anglo–Japanese alliance in August 1905. Conservatives in the Commonwealth parliament were, for the most part, more inclined to put their trust in Britain and the Royal Navy, but liberal protectionists and Labor politicians were more than ready to step up to the hustings.

Alfred Deakin and Chris Watson were active in the formation of the Immigration League in Sydney in October 1905, and a National Defence League was formed in December, its advocates including four members of the first House of Representatives—Watson, Hughes, Deakin and T. T. Ewing. Ewing was an extreme exponent of the ‘Yellow Peril’ doctrine, a great spinner of yarns and a supporter of universal military training. Like Pearce, he was another defence minister in waiting, and in the meantime busied himself with urgent causes.⁹

Everyone in the Commonwealth parliament now recognised the unprecedented change in Australia’s strategic situation, but not everyone was as alarmed as these eloquent sentinels. Some of the free-trade conservatives were sufficiently sentimental in their loyalties and sufficiently devoted to Britain’s greater wisdom to put their trust in the assurances coming from London. And the inclination to trade with Asia, and profit by way of commerce and compromise, was always there—as David Walker’s landmark study *Anxious Nation* amply demonstrates.¹⁰

A free-trade government under George Reid was briefly in power (August 1904 – July 1905) as national governments came and went with a mere shuffling of the political cards. Reid made concessions to the Japanese even before their victory—a ‘gentlemen’s agreement’—concessions enabling Japanese merchants, students and tourists to avoid the irksome formalities of the language test at the hands of some gruff customs official in an Australian port.¹¹

But despite the free-trader tendency and the reservations of a few Labor men, in the eighteen months following Deakin’s *Herald* interview, expressions of apprehension about Asian and notably Japanese ambitions became the commonplace of defence debates and speeches. Feelings were

running high: when the Sydney based free-trader Senator Edward Pulsford released a pamphlet supporting Japanese protests about the administration of the White Australia policy, some colleagues thought him unsound of mind and Senator George Pearce demanded he be ‘impeached’.¹²

The Japanese victory in 1905 was all the more stunning because it was entirely unexpected. It came as a great shock to the European lords of humankind. In London, the foreign-news editor for *The Times* wrote that Japan’s triumph had brought the vexed matter of race, and the relations between East and West, ‘to our very doors’. Commentators in many parts of the world—the United States, Africa, the Middle East, India and the Dutch East Indies—editorialised on the meaning of this stunning turnaround.

The victory gave hope to downtrodden peoples. Even Gandhi, notwithstanding his pacifist convictions, was willing to applaud the Japanese victory. When the Japanese forced the Russians to ‘bite the dust on the battlefield’, as Gandhi put it, ‘the sun rose in the East’ and ‘the peoples of the East will never, never again submit to insult from insolent whites.’¹³

Sidney Gulick’s 1905 study, *The White Peril in the Far East*, threw more light on the insult arising from the personal interactions of white people and their colonial subjects in Asia. Writing from a Christian-internationalist perspective, Gulick reported on the years of abuse, discrimination and violence that had stirred an Asian desire for revenge, on the humiliation and hurt arising from innumerable moments of discourteous or brutal treatment.

But if the Japanese victory rallied oppressed peoples, it also stirred race fears among white populations on the Pacific Rim, notably in centres where Chinese or Japanese immigrants were concentrated, such as California and British Columbia. In both places, political movements to severely discriminate against or to ‘oust the coloureds’ had created something of a headache for the central government. And in both places the British encouraged compromise, while Japanese diplomats were able to salvage something in the way of conciliation with the assistance of Washington and Ottawa. The critics said these ‘east coast’ politicians could never understand the feelings of white communities poised, precariously, on the edge of the Pacific; and Australian leaders took much the same lesson from these case studies in unhappy compromise. They observed a disturbing new pattern of diplomacy. The scenario that most troubled them was one in which Japanese pressure to modify immigration laws, in effect to

undermine a white Australia, might be allowed by a British government beleaguered with problems in the North Atlantic and all too dependent on Japanese support in the Pacific.¹⁴

President Theodore Roosevelt had declared early in 1905 that the Pacific Basin was the region most likely to determine which race would come to dominate the globe, and he was not alone in his concerns. Other prominent voices now weighed in to a discussion that was widely aired in the English-speaking world. Some saw Charles Pearson's prophecy in the race tensions on the Pacific Rim. Some pondered his prediction of the inevitable decline of the white man's dominion. The rise of Japan—its military prowess, its diplomatic finesse—appeared to confirm his wisdom. Deakin, especially, worried that the prophecy of his great mentor might be coming true. Driven by a new sense of urgency, he was determined to lead the way.

Another Case of British Perversity?

Becoming prime minister for a second time in July 1905, Deakin governed with Labor support. This was just weeks after his landmark *Herald* interview. He tackled the problem of Japan with measured compromise on one hand and strident assertion on the other. The compromise was a gesture in the direction of Britain's awkward position, what A. J. Balfour called the 'obvious difficulties—not to say absurdities—in allowing Australia and other colonies to treat our Japanese allies as belonging to an inferior race'.¹⁵

The gesture took the form of an amendment to the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901, a legislative change not dissimilar to the 'gentlemen's agreement' quietly negotiated by George Reid in 1904. It provided for the exemption of select Japanese visitors from the rigours of the language test, on the understanding that the Japanese government would prevent the emigration of its citizens to Australia, and it replaced the offensive European-language test with a seemingly more neutral option—a test in 'any prescribed language'.¹⁶

Deakin had negotiated these changes directly through the Japanese consul-general, thus flouting the expectation that all foreign policy matters should be handled by the Colonial Office. The governor-general was displeased and so was the new colonial secretary, Lord Elgin: 'No one,' he wrote, 'would dream of swamping Australia with Japanese—or any other

coloured race—but I do think it is reasonable that we who are responsible to our allies should be consulted when legislation which may affect them is proposed.’¹⁷

If the amendment to the Immigration Restriction Act was the measured compromise, the strident assertion was, from here on, Deakin’s relentless campaign for a national defence.

His determination was perhaps shored up by the most recent development in the seemingly never-ending saga of the New Hebrides. Deakin wanted nothing short of complete annexation by Britain to ensure the deep-water harbours were never again available to France, but France and Britain had more important concerns in the Mediterranean: France wanted British support for its Moroccan ambitions, while Britain wanted the French to recognise its pre-eminence in Egypt. Neither power was inclined to allow the New Hebrides to disturb the main game. In 1904 the two nations agreed to maintain the status quo and in February 1906 they declared their joint ‘paramount rights’ in the island group. As one Colonial Office man put it: ‘The Australians who have never had to face any diplomatic difficulty seem to think we can treat France as if she were Tonga or Samoa.’¹⁸

Deakin saw the failure to consider Australian concerns as part of a pattern of malign indifference dating back decades, back at least to Lord Derby’s complicity in the German acquisition of northern New Guinea. In his regular *Morning Post* column (always anonymous, a delicious secret) he declared that the New Hebrides settlement confirmed the ‘supineness of the British government and the wilful indifference of “Downing St.” to all Australian affairs’. Deakin firmly believed that, notwithstanding the crimson thread of kinship, the contest for territory and resources at the heart of the empire would always outweigh strategic needs, even those of white Britons, on the far reaches of the Pacific.¹⁹

As his biographer John La Nauze explains, Deakin suffered decades of frustration in his dealings with London, the Colonial Office in particular. Rightly or wrongly, he took the view that the settler colonies (not India) should be consulted on all relevant matters, as it seemed to him that whatever Colonial Office officials might profess to know about Britain’s empire, their ignorance of that empire was profound.²⁰

Deakin wanted an Australian naval flotilla under Commonwealth command and a national scheme for universal military service. He wanted

an end to the naval-agreement subsidy, and the funds put to the purchase of torpedo boats and coastal destroyers for coastal defence and, especially, for defence of the cities.²¹ But he was hampered by the straitened financial circumstances of the Commonwealth and by the hard reality that Admiralty co-operation was essential, as the British navy must remain the first and principal line of Australia's defence.

Early in 1906 he cabled his old friend Sir George Clarke, a former governor of Victoria and now secretary of the Committee of Imperial Defence, a body established in 1904 and charged with integrating the strategic policy of the empire.²² The upshot was a committee report that reached the Australian government in July 1906. It flatly contradicted Deakin's aspirations and those of his senior naval adviser, William Rooke Creswell, insisting there was no case for a local Australian force of ocean-going and coastal destroyers and torpedo boats, such as Creswell had advised. It implied Deakin's strategic concerns were quite unwarranted. Better to put trained Australians into the fleets and squadrons of the Royal Navy. 'Trust the Navy'!²³

But Deakin did not trust the Admiralty. He took the view, so eloquently spelled out by Hughes in 1901, and others since, that even with the best will in the world, the urgent demands of the empire might render Australia abandoned in its own time of crisis. In his column in the *Morning Post*, he advised readers that the sentiment of self-defence was growing stronger as Australians came to realise their 'strategically perilous position south of the awakening Asian peoples'.

He wrote to his friend Richard Jebb, expressing his exasperation. The report, he said, was 'only emphatic in its condemnation of any and every plan of allowing Australia a floating defence of any kind on any terms. What can one do with such people?'²⁴

Thus, on the matter of a navy, established by Australia and for Australia, Deakin's every instinct was defiance. He felt his only choice was to plough ahead. The idea was out and about. The press and public opinion were rallying. A federal election was due in December and Deakin was in campaign mode, well aware that political sentiment was with him on this issue.²⁵ On 26 September 1906, he addressed the House on the subject of the much-awaited report. Given his private words to Jebb we might assume a certain irony and perhaps a bitter subtext to the carefully phrased exposition he provided for the public record:

The Imperial Defence Committee, on the last page of their report, tell us that the value of any vessels we had for local defences was never great...They then proceed to urge that the best and, indeed, the only necessary naval defence for Australia can be provided by the Admiralty increasing the number of its own ships, which may be manned and officered by Australians, but which will be included in the Royal Navy. This means that what is ordinarily called 'blue water' defence is to suffice for Australia, and that there is no necessity for undertaking harbour-defence of a floating character.

Deakin was not prepared to accept that these assurances would always apply. It would be 'the height of folly', he argued, 'to disregard the possibility of the supremacy of the sea being temporarily or permanently lost'. Looking to the future he could see that possibility. He made no mention of Japan but instead reviewed the shipbuilding programs of Britain and Germany, noting the latter was fast overhauling the former, 'an alteration of the greatest moment in the battleship sea-power of the world'. He stressed how vulnerable and 'exposed' was Australia in the event 'the domination of the oceans which the mother country has enjoyed were in any respect shaken', but his review suggested that the shaking was already underway. He was anxious, too, to press the point that a local navy would surely be a positive contribution to the resources of empire defence:

We must all recognize with sympathy the burden of the 'weary Titan', as Great Britain has been poetically termed, bearing 'the too vast orb of her fate'. We can realize how great, even for so wealthy a people, is the cost of her Army and Navy, amounting to £60,000,000 per annum. Still, even while recognising that enormous strain, it comes somewhat as a shock of surprise to find that if the present policy be pursued, she appears likely to assume the character of 'a weary Triton', conscious at last of the weight of the sceptre of the seas. Is her fleet sufficient for her destiny? It is said not.²⁶

A titan is one thing; a triton is another—usually a manly figure with a fish's tail, carrying a trident and a shell trumpet. There was always a sharp edge to the very smooth Deakin.

Tensions in London, and the Pacific

Now they were preparing for the Imperial Conference set for April 1907, and Deakin and his advisers were apprised of Japanese–American tensions in California, the rallies and the riots, the racial discrimination against Japanese residents and their children in local schools. The conflict was widely covered in the press, as was the unstable peace that followed. Speakers in the Commonwealth parliament in February 1907 returned to a familiar theme—a new, powerful and cunning force in the Pacific with

diplomatic leverage in the capitals of the English-speaking world, notably London and Washington.²⁷

Joseph Cook, deputy leader of the free-traders, spoke of 'the menace' of Asiatic migration which was 'gradually closing in around us'. He did not cite Japan, but spoke instead of overcrowding in Asia, the growing presence of Asians in the islands to the north, the 'constant temptation' of a 'large, empty, fertile continent' and the urgent necessity to see to its defence.²⁸

Lieutenant-Colonel Cameron advised the Senate that Australia needed a large army. He thought Russia still a formidable threat to India, thus to the empire, and he did not put much faith in the Anglo-Japanese alliance:

I would like those who are in favour of a White Australia to ask themselves whether they are going to admit and to allow the position that a coloured race is to sustain them? If they admit that this coloured race is going to sustain them, do they think that they will be able to keep them out of Australia?²⁹

The Californian events only sharpened Deakin's sense of purpose as he and his wife, Pattie, departed for London in early March 1907. He arrived at the Imperial Conference with big plans, plans for new institutions of imperial governance in which the self-governing white Dominions would have a permanent voice. He envisaged an Australian navy and, with that, an end or some significant modification to the naval agreement of 1903. But his high hopes for a modicum of power-sharing at the centre were not realised and his naval ambitions were thwarted too. Though the Admiralty appeared to be sympathetic, it soon became evident they were stonewalling. They failed to see in Japan the threat that so troubled the Australians. They considered Australia's defence adequately provided for, and they harboured as much resentment as Deakin, for once again the self-governing colonies had roundly refused to raise an 'imperial reserve', and place troops at the beck and call of the War Office.

In the course of many speeches to the conference, Deakin restated grievances long held about Britain's failure to support Australia's Pacific ambitions. British officials thought him 'bitter, parochial, perpetual in his talk'. One of them reckoned Deakin 'hated' the United Kingdom, a complete misreading. He was, quite simply, not for bending.³⁰ He could not be duchessed or bought.

These encounters took their toll, as did the entire venture. The conference, and the accompanying social calendar, was one long whirl of

dressing, motoring, dining, banqueting, conferring, speechifying and agitating, and it was exhausting. Deakin came home weak, ill and suffering from dizzy spells. Billy Hughes reckoned the prime minister had suffered a 'nervous breakdown'. Deakin tried to press on but he could not. He was out of action, recuperating at his Point Lonsdale holiday house over several months.³¹

In the meantime, the press fanned anxiety and public opinion began to shift. More trouble on the west coast of America. Reports of anti-Oriental riots in San Francisco, and a war scare whipped up by the American media. This was followed by Roosevelt's midyear decision to send the Atlantic fleet for a tour of the Pacific, muscle-flexing to put the Japanese in their place and to reaffirm the vital shipping routes that linked America to territories seized as recently as 1898—Hawaii and the Philippines.

Deakin was still convalescing but he responded to the troubled waters on the Pacific with another public statement on the need for a national defence. He did not mention Japan but there was no need: he told the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 'we or our children might have to meet no ordinary foes.' He said the crisis 'might mean peril to all we hold most dear, our family, our industrial life and perhaps the religious faith we cherish'. He wanted an Australia uncontaminated by alien strangers and false gods. He called for a 'supplement to the strength of the Empire', for until Australians took up that civic obligation they were, he said, 'only tenants in this continent'.³²

Other politicians shared their heightened concerns as Japanese–American relations continued to deteriorate. Hughes submitted, yet again, his resolution for compulsory military service, a universal training scheme for 'home defence only'. He summoned themes long held close to his heart—the defence of the nation, a primary and sacred duty; the fragility of democracy; the perils of remoteness and a naval agreement which entailed a 'second rate or third rate naval detachment'; and a Mother Country with resources spread thin having 'never hesitated to stretch out a predatory hand to gather fresh territories into its overladen arms'.

Hughes reminded Australians they were living in a 'fool's paradise'. He acknowledged Japan's rapid development in all spheres—a nation 'no longer to be despised or spoken of as barbarian'. He declared Japan a warlike and expansionist state, with Australia most vulnerable given its vast coastline, tiny population and feeble defence. He suggested that sooner or later Japan would challenge white Australia, for that policy had mightily

offended all of Asia and, ‘unless backed up by some adequate display of force on our part, is likely to embroil us in quarrels which may lead to disaster’. Finally, he spoke of the naiveté of

others in the community content to rely upon the might of Great Britain, although they know very well that the Empire may at any moment be precipitated into a struggle which will necessitate the forces available for the defence of this country being withdrawn to some more vital spot, or dissipated to the four corners of the earth. When that day comes we shall have to depend—as we ought to depend now—upon ourselves alone.³³

For all their differences, Hughes and Deakin were committed to the empire, notwithstanding its faults. They were race patriots, but they were also fierce critics of the Colonial Office, unable to accept that Britain could not or would not make the antipodean cause a matter of the first order of importance.³⁴

When he was in better health, Deakin returned to Melbourne and went to work, intent as ever to pursue his urgent quest for an Australian navy and a citizen’s army. The navy discussions with the British government proceeded but they were going nowhere.³⁵ Admiralty sanction was not forthcoming.

Late in 1907 Deakin decided on a two-pronged attack. On the last day before parliament adjourned for Christmas he addressed the House on defence—a major speech confirming the nation must have, at its own expense, a flotilla of submarines and destroyers under the command of the Australian government, and a sizeable citizen army with a system of universal training for a National Guard of Defence. He told the parliament that the nations of the world were arming in ‘more feverish haste than ever before’ and Australia was ‘not outside the area of world conflict’, and he employed the language of duty and citizenship to rally his colleagues and the public.³⁶

His speech captivated the new Labor leader, Andrew Fisher, and Senator Pearce was inspired to write a letter of congratulations to his prime minister in which he commiserated with Deakin over the Admiralty’s stubbornness and cited a speech by a Japanese politician urging an extension of the search for markets to the South Seas. ‘Above all we must watch to the North,’ wrote Pearce, in order to keep Australia safe for the white race.³⁷

The Great White Fleet

In the week leading up to Christmas 1907, Deakin took a new tack, aiming to hurry things along. Roosevelt was soon to send the American fleet to tour the Pacific in the wake of the Californian troubles. Deakin saw an opportunity. He wrote to the American consul in Sydney, John Bray, inviting the fleet to visit Australia. And early in the New Year he followed up with a similar letter marked 'Confidential' to Whitelaw Reid, the American ambassador in London. In so doing he bypassed the conventional lines of communication requiring such matters to go through the Colonial Office: the office did not learn of his assertive act of independence for some weeks.³⁸

Deakin had snubbed the 'proper channels', convinced that national security must prevail over imperial procedure. In his letter to Whitelaw Reid he stressed blood ties, their shared interest as neighbours on the Pacific Rim and the timeliness of this 'demonstration of naval power in what may be loosely termed our Oceanic neighbourhood'.³⁹

A Japanese squadron had again visited Australia in 1906 and was feted by dignitaries and intently observed by large, curious crowds, but the press was now far more divided and ambivalent about these 'allies' and the public enthusiasm could hardly match the rapturous response to the American flotilla when it arrived in 1908. There was general agreement that the Great White Fleet drew bigger and more enthusiastic crowds than any event in Australian history, including the ceremonies that ushered in the Commonwealth on January 1901.⁴⁰

The press joined with the people, giving the Americans a rousing welcome, with talk of solidarity and common interests in the face of Asia's millions. The editorials rang as much with racial fervour as relief. 'To Australia, the lone guardian of white civilization in the Pacific,' the *West Australian* intoned loftily, 'the message that comes cannon-tongued by the swift and stalwart messengers of the deep has but one import—an assurance of amity charged with power.'⁴¹

The *Courier* in Brisbane took the opportunity to call again for compulsory military training and a local navy, and to warn of a terrible reckoning:

Australia will perish as the home of the white man unless the national consciousness is awakened to impending dangers... and the opportunity [taken] for joining hands with America if need be in preventing the flooding of the territories now belonging to the white races in the Pacific with teeming millions from the Asiatic mainland.⁴²

The ships were painted white to advertise their peaceful intentions but the colour could not fail to convey a certain racial association, given the blood talk that accompanied their arrival. The fleet sailed into Sydney Harbour on 20 August 1908, watched by vast crowds from the foreshores. Deakin welcomed the officers and men ‘native to our race and to our ancestors... invisible ties drawing us together as states united in affection, in our heritage of freedom and our ideas’. He wrote to Richard Jebb, advising that the fleet was welcomed

Not so much because of our blood affection for the Americans though that is sincere but because of our distrust of the yellow races in the Pacific and our recognition of the ‘entente cordiale’ spreading amongst all white races who realise the Yellow Peril to Caucasian civilization creeds and politics.⁴³

The Americans’ visit gave rise to a great deal of racial talk, fear of the ‘yellow peril’ being the most common sentiment expressed during the tour, according to Franklin Matthews, an officially accredited journalist travelling with the fleet. Matthews also noticed the outpouring of patriotic verse—including from C. E. W. Bean, as we saw in chapter one—occasioned by the coming of the Americans. Mailbags full of it, and some of this verse was turned to song.

Roderic Quinn was a respected poet with a keen sense of the racial menace confronting Australia. He thought the nation in imminent danger of falling prey to one of the Asiatic races. His poem ‘Hail! Men of America, Hail!’ was sung by five hundred schoolchildren at Sydney’s St Mary’s Cathedral. The message was clear—race solidarity as epitomised by the Fleet was the way to salvation:

The powers of the earth are as lions
That scent afar feast on the gale;
For the sake of our race of the future
Hail! Men of America, Hail!⁴⁴

Some verse was even more explicit on the matter of the Asian menace, hailing the prospect that America might join forces with their British brethren to resist Asian aggression:

Not heedless of your high descent,
The grand old Anglo-Saxon race,
To check with stern unflinching mace,
The swarming, hungry Orient.⁴⁵

At a farewell Sydney function, the hosts proposed a toast to Rear-Admiral Sperry's health, describing the 'gallant sailor' as a 'real white man'. And in reply Sperry declared: 'I speak to you as a white man to white men, and, may I add, to very white men. (Loud cheers.)'⁴⁶

The new circumstances of the Pacific—Britain gone, Japan unchecked—inspired yet another round of public agitation and another burst of invasion-themed writing. Perhaps the most notable contribution came from Frank Fox, alias C. H. Kirmess, friend of Alfred Deakin. His futuristic invasion novel first appeared in instalments in the *Lone Hand*, an offshoot of the *Bulletin*, in October 1908. Like many of his literary colleagues, Fox was stirred by the issue of colour and race, and alarmed at the emergence of Japan.

'The Commonwealth Crisis' is set in 1912–13, when the Japanese have penetrated Australia's far north and the task of removing them hinges on the patriotism and valour of the White Guard, an army of race patriots who know peril when they see it and are stirred to action. In keeping with the bush legend, it is men from the country who rally to the White Guard. They are the mainstay of the resistance and, backed by the Americans, they will rescue the nation from racial ruin. The narrator sings their praises: 'A finer body of men never took the field to do battle for Aryan ideals. It was composed of the sturdy sons of the Australian bush, set off by just a dash of a cosmopolitan element'—meaning the Americans.⁴⁷

While Frank Fox was writing 'The Commonwealth Crisis', Thomas Ewing presented the Defence Bill to the Parliament for a Second Reading. He was asked what kind of invading force his proposals were intended to repel. He answered that he was not a prophet nor the son of a prophet so the future was difficult to know, but he knew that a compulsory military training scheme was urgently needed:

I believe that, in the future, national existence in Australia, and the lives of our children, will be seriously imperilled. The great work for us to do is to preserve Australia as a white man's country for our children and their descendants. If honourable members read Professor Pearson's great work which has been referred to by recent critics as being more in the nature of a prophecy than an alarmist statement, they will see that he points out that Europe and America will certainly remain white, and that Asia and Africa will remain black, but that there are very serious doubts with regard to Australia.⁴⁸

The next day, a Labor man rose in the House of Representatives to put a question to the prime minister. John Keith McDougall was another self-

taught member with little formal education, a farmer and a poet. In 1906, he won the federal seat of Wannon in rural Victoria, despite a disastrous campaign launch when he suffered an acute bout of stage fright and was unable to speak. In the House, he rarely participated in debate and his critics dubbed him 'the Silent Member', but he worked assiduously for his constituency and kept himself visible in the parliament with an occasional question to a minister.

On this occasion, his question was wordy by his standards. The subject had stirred him to a sardonic fluency. He wanted to know if Deakin had seen a 'leading article' in the *Age* of 28 September 1908. He quoted from it:

Without Britain's help Japan could not have won the great sea fights of the Russian War...Britain took that alien race in hand and, with a generosity unparalleled in history, she placed her dockyards, her ships, her science, her instructors, and her arsenals at the disposal of her Japanese pupils, and she did not cease her efforts until her ally was in a position to become navally paramount in the Pacific.

McDougall wanted the prime minister to clarify:

(a) Why the British Admiralty jealously insists that the desire of the people of the Commonwealth to build and direct a navy for their own protection shall not be allowed to reach fulfilment; and (b) Why the British Government assisted with such ready lavishness to develop a Japanese Navy?

He was anxious to know if Deakin thought 'that Britain, in assisting to develop the Japanese Navy, showed any material concern for the future of the Australian Commonwealth'. He was worried for the future—a Japan armed to the teeth and loaded with a formidable diplomatic leverage such as no other Asian nation could exercise.⁴⁹

McDougall's questions were sharp-edged and symptomatic of a collective mindset that would carry a succession of Commonwealth governments onward to feverish preparation for war, both military and diplomatic. The driving force behind race patriotism from 1905 to 1914, and thence to Versailles, was a simple equation: distrust of Britain, fear of Japan.

The Fate of the Peruvians

‘Half-a-dozen mighty kingdoms could find accommodation on this continent, and we are surrounded by nations hungering for room and breathing space.’

Joseph Cook, *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, 21 September 1909

‘While it is right to compel a man to fit himself to defend his country, it is not proper to compel him to fight beyond it.’

Billy Hughes, *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, 13 October 1909

In May 1908, the tariff act passed into law and the fight over trade policy that had shaped political alignments since federation was over for the moment. Labor withdrew its support for Alfred Deakin’s government and Andrew Fisher became the nation’s second Labor prime minister.¹

In policy matters Deakin was still much closer to Labor, but he could not accept their state-socialist objectives nor the tribal obligation of voting as caucus required. What had been an alliance of congruity and convenience on vital questions such as trade policy, social reform and defence, was now sputtering to a close. In the absence of an electoral majority, governments would come and go as if the oversight of the Commonwealth was a game of musical chairs. Deakin’s anonymous *Morning Post* column carried an ominous line: ‘Mr Fisher will be Prime Minister as long as Mr Deakin thinks fit to leave him there.’²

Defence was now in the hands of a Labor triumvirate: Pearce, Hughes and Fisher. Pearce held the portfolio. His views on world politics flowed readily from his racial anxieties. Like Hughes, he was not inclined to trust Japan, whereas Fisher was slower to see the dangers that his colleagues envisaged in the Pacific scene. Like his predecessor, Chris Watson, he was committed to a white Australia not merely for 'industrial' advantage, but for 'racial' purity. On this, Fisher was emphatic.³ And by 1908, he was a convert, fully supportive of Deakin's program for a national defence and the assumptions underpinning it.

Deakin had departed the prime ministership with the case for a national defence well won, but he had hardly begun to implement the practical side of his ambition for an Australian navy. His bill for compulsory military training had lapsed with the fall of his government and the trust fund he had established for defence purposes was unspent. It was left to Fisher to continue the practical program for the navy, and to introduce the compulsory scheme for home defence 'and home defence only', as Hughes would have it.

The timing could not have been worse. As the government placed orders for three torpedo-boat destroyers and readied for its defence scheme, the 'dreadnought scare' broke and public opinion was swayed by a furious campaign in favour of putting Britain first, by gifting the cost of a dreadnought to London.⁴

An Admiralty report had suggested that the German battleship-building program was outstripping the British competition and threatened British supremacy at sea. A supremacy in slow decline was one thing; a supremacy about to be usurped by Germany was another. The report caused panic in Britain and the alarm was picked up by the Australian press.⁵ Newspapers, patriotic organisations such as the Australian Natives Association, conservative politicians and state premiers led the campaign to raise the necessary funds. The cause was boosted by tacit endorsement from the British government and news that New Zealand had not hesitated to fall into line. The cost of a dreadnought was almost twice the current Commonwealth defence budget and yet, in this terrible moment, money seemed no object.

The dreadnought scare illustrates how delicately poised were Australian worries about remoteness in the Pacific and how mixed were feelings about Britain. Australian ambivalence was evident in a seemingly contradictory

policy of alternatively falling all over the Mother Country and otherwise denouncing her indifference. It was a confusion of compulsions which hinged on the dilemma of unavoidable dependence and uncertain reliability—the conflicting impulses characteristic of abandonment anxiety.

Pearce, for example, was at first defiant. He told an ANA meeting in Melbourne that ‘he knew already of a nation which was not Germany but was darker-skinned’ that was spying out for land with a view to ‘confiscation’.⁶ And Hughes was scathing in his criticism of ‘the frenzy’. But Hughes and Pearce wavered on the dreadnought issue, while notable converts were Deakin and the *Age* newspaper. Both Deakin and the Melbourne daily had campaigned for years for a local navy and well knew the cost of ‘the gift’, as it was called. The widely shared perception, even for the most ardent nationalist, was that Australia faced racial ruin if Britain were defeated. In these circumstances convictions faltered, positions shifted and, ever so briefly, Labor’s defence policy was in question.

But Fisher was not for turning. He pressed on with a defence program for the purchase of coastal and river-class destroyers, for compulsory military training and for an Australian munitions industry. A month later he asked the British government to convene a defence conference to once again consider how the parts of the empire, eager and ever-changing, might be integrated into the whole.

He would not be bullied. He would not succumb to the fanatical campaigns for ‘the gift’, but nor would he allow Deakin or anyone else to suggest his only concern was Australia. His call for a defence conference was timely—the British government cabled an identical proposal at the same time that Fisher cabled his. The messages might have crossed in transit.

Fisher would have sent Pearce to the conference in London had the opportunity arisen, but his government’s defeat in May 1909 meant this was not possible. Deakin was again prime minister, having negotiated an alliance with the anti-Labor conservatives, men he had fought, year in, year out, since 1901. His unlikely commitment to the cause of ‘the gift’ was perhaps a masterstroke of political cunning, for in all other respects he required new allies to accept his policies, including his national program for defence *and* a defence industry. John Forrest’s anti-socialist protectionists and Joseph Cook’s anti-socialist free-traders were so riven that no single

individual in their ranks was acceptable as a leader, leaving Deakin ‘the pivot of the whole situation’, as he coyly put it.⁷

The next two days in parliament were pandemonium. The galleries were packed; the newly united opposition clapped him as he rose to speak, and the House fell into disorder amid hissing and cheering and a shout of ‘Judas!’ Hughes declared the disciple slandered and Fisher wanted to know why Deakin had abandoned the alliance; Deakin said he was only repeating what Labor had done to him last year. The Labor leader called it a change that ‘astounded and disgusted many of the citizens of the Commonwealth’. But Hughes made the sharpest cuts. He said all Deakin’s achievements had come with Labor support, yet now he sided with men he had unsparingly denounced. Hughes was unrestrained in his condemnation of the duplicity he saw in Deakin’s behaviour:

There is not a vested interest in this country now that does not acclaim him as their champion. He stands to-day under the banner of the Employers’ Federation, under the banner of every vested interest, of every powerful monopoly. What a career his has been! In his hands, at various times, have rested the banners of every party in this country. He has proclaimed them all, he has held them all, he has betrayed them all.

Hughes saw the cause of Deakin’s most recent alignment in Labor’s radical policies, notably the proposal for a land tax—which would assist defence funding—and the commitment to state socialism. Where the liberal protectionists wished to regulate monopolies, Labor wanted to own them. He conjured Deakin as a tool of the big capitalists:

The great vested interests needed a leader to protect them; and they have found one ready to their hand. He has persuaded those who called themselves democrats to go over to the reactionaries. He has persuaded the reactionaries, for the time being, to cover their vulpine faces with the wool of the sheep. But the people, when they have an opportunity, will tear that cover off them, and disclose them as they are. And they will sweep into outer darkness, too, those who, professing democracy, have betrayed them. I leave it now to the House and the country to decide between us. I venture to say that in spite of everything that the honorable member and his allies can do, they will be compelled to face their masters before very long.⁸

A White Fleet for a White Ocean

The tensions within the anti-Labor parties of the so-called Fusion government were such that none of the various faction leaders were inclined to go to London for the conference and leave the shop unguarded. There were few points of agreement to hold them together—save Labor, the

enemy—a position which Deakin now adopted with relish. Cook, the minister for defence, was staying put, not willing to leave Deakin unwatched for months; and Deakin could not afford to abandon the parliamentary scene, leaving colleagues he hardly trusted to run his show. In his place, Deakin sent Colonel Justin Foxton, an honorary minister and a keen militia officer, a sufficiently conservative fellow to have the backing of his colleagues and sufficiently Japan-fixated to satisfy them all.⁹

Foxton departed, well tutored in the government's position and armed with a clever way out of Deakin's dreadnought offer. Might not the funds be put to a vessel reserved for the South Pacific, thus harmonising a patriotic offer with local prejudice?

As it happened, a new Admiralty scheme, a startling turnabout, dovetailed nicely with Deakin's harmonising proposal. Both the British government and the Admiralty had been stunned by Deakin's enterprise and resolve, by the American fleet's tumultuous reception in Sydney and Melbourne in 1908, by the unflagging commitment in Australia to an independent navy, and by the failure of the Dominions—all but New Zealand—to rise to the 'scare' and subsidise dreadnoughts for Home defence. They were troubled, too, by Japan's expansionist tendencies. These were hard realities and they prompted a radical departure in strategic thinking—a proposal for an Imperial Pacific Fleet.¹⁰

The proposal was the brainchild of the First Sea Lord, Admiral John (Jackie) Fisher. He had previously been the source of considerable angst in Australia when, in September 1905, he declared in the *Fortnightly Review*, 'The English Channel and North Sea have become the frontier of the British Empire,' and promptly withdrew Britain's five battleships from the Pacific. But Fisher was nothing if not responsive to changes in circumstance. He now proposed a scheme to reassert British prestige in the Far East—a fleet based on contributions from Australia, Canada, New Zealand and Britain, the combined effect of which would be a renewal of British supremacy in the Pacific.

As Humphrey McQueen has observed, had it been honoured the scheme 'would have satisfied at one extreme those Australians who wanted their own navy, and at the other extreme, those New Zealanders who believed in augmenting imperial forces'. Colonel Foxton welcomed the idea, noting that it addressed the specific concerns of Australians:

There is always present with us in Australia—and the same remarks apply with equal force to New Zealand—the fact that we are in close proximity to the teeming millions of two great Asiatic powers, and although at present everything is as one could wish from the Australian and New Zealand point of view, we have to look far into the future, and there might be possibilities in that connection which it is necessary for us to make provision for.¹¹

The conference had endorsed, at last, an Australian navy in an imperial formation. It appeared to be a triumph for Australia, for that navy would now be an integral part of a new Pacific fleet, a white fleet for a white ocean; and based on this assumption, Foxton made a vital concession—that Australia would ‘take its share in the general defence of the Empire’.¹²

Deakin did not delay. He ordered ships from Britain and saw a Naval Loans Act safely through the parliament to pay for the fleet with funds borrowed from London, and he invited Lord Kitchener to tour Australia and report on military needs. But he did not wait upon the legendary lord’s opinions—he proceeded with his defence bill before Kitchener arrived.

The defence minister, Joseph Cook, introduced the bill to the parliament on 21 September 1909. Cook was yet another parliamentarian whose journey to the corridors of Commonwealth power could hardly have been foreseen. He had progressed in life from the poverty of a coalmining family in Staffordshire, England, to journalism and book-keeping in Lithgow, New South Wales, and from Labor politics to anti-socialism and conservative loyalism. His commitment to public service and good works was ever grounded in his devotion to Primitive Methodism, but the salvation of the nation was far more than a spiritual matter for Cook. It was racial, and race was a formidable element in the shaping of the bill.

Cook set out the government’s defence policy in light of the Pacific fleet proposal and the war clouds gathering in Europe. ‘Every nation is arming to the teeth,’ he said. He observed Australians had hitherto relied on Great Britain for their preservation and he called for change:

We have set up a White Australia ideal. I hope that that ideal will always be looked to and guarded by all those who have to do with the government of this country. But we are depending for its maintenance upon a country which is not able to close its doors to the coloured labour of the world as we do...It is time...that we stood up to our responsibility in this matter.

He reviewed the naval and military forces presently in the Pacific, noting Japan’s unrivalled superiority at that time, Australia’s ‘absolute’ dependence on the good faith of Japan and, more generally, the dangers emanating from Asia:

Another fact which we cannot ignore is the existence, not far from our shores, of 2,000,000 or 3,000,000 of the best trained troops in the world. They belong to a nation whose ideals are, in many respects, as unlike our own as it is possible for them to be...Australia is the most distant, the richest, and, at the same time, the most vulnerable part of the British Empire. Half-a-dozen mighty kingdoms could find accommodation on this continent, and we are surrounded by nations hungering for room and breathing space.

Cook was able to end his review on a high note. The defence conference had inaugurated a 'fuller Imperial partnership'. Australia now had a role in the Pacific in tandem with other members of the empire, 'a systematic and efficient combination'; and, on that basis, Australians might look to the future with confidence, 'not caring for aught that may be brought against us'.

An army for a nation would complement this new partnership on the waters. The defence minister spelled out the details and the costs of the compulsory training scheme for young men, from 1909 to 1914, when the scheme would be fully operational. He noted it would be a white army, made up of men of substantially European origin. In the defence of white Australia there was to be no place in this army for coloureds or Aborigines, and he confirmed what had been agreed at the defence conference—that Dominion forces should be co-ordinated as far as possible 'should the Empire as a whole be challenged'.

Here we glimpse the psychology of dependence at work, the deep sense of indebtedness that conservative loyalists harboured. Australia had long been a drain on the empire, according to Cook, a beneficiary with a debt to pay. He declared his hope that in future the nation 'might be a buttress to the Empire, instead of a burden upon it'.

By way of such musings, Cook may have strayed too far. Late in his address he broached the sensitive question of 'an expeditionary force for immediate dispatch overseas...whenever the Government of the day feel themselves under an obligation to send the force'.

Andrew Fisher was perplexed. The Commonwealth Defence Act explicitly denied a government the power to deploy troops outside Australia. Raising the subject of an expeditionary force in the course of a provision for compulsory military training stirred the Labor leader's suspicions. A sharp exchange followed. Cook hedged and dodged, and finally retreated to an elementary loyalist position: 'if these men are wanted for overseas service, in the defence of Empire, no Government of the Commonwealth worthy of the name would hesitate to send them.'¹³

Hughes joined the contest, working his way towards this ‘sinister’ matter with a typical mix of insight and sarcasm. He chided Cook for his remarkable conversion to the cause of national defence on land and sea. He reviewed, as he had many times before, the ‘parlous’ situation in the Pacific, the battleships of the white nations far outnumbered by the Japanese. Then he turned to Cook’s mysterious retort during his exchange with Fisher: ‘The honourable member has not grasped now that the basic principle of compulsory military training is that it shall be for home defence.’ He said Cook must retreat on the point, for ‘while it is right to compel a man to fit himself to defend his country, it is not proper to compel him to fight beyond it.’¹⁴

Hughes’s journey to conscription for overseas service still had a long way to go, but the anxieties that shaped that journey were ever present in the parliament, even in 1909. Two days after Hughes tangled with Cook, the government introduced a bill for the Commonwealth to take over the Northern Territory from South Australia. Deakin urged members to abandon the remnants of old state jealousies and focus on the national issues at stake. The north must be settled and developed by the white race, he said, else it would fall prey to ‘some other nation’.¹⁵

The Coming of the Lord

Kitchener’s visit was Cook’s inspired idea, and Deakin was persuaded by it. He saw political benefits in the tour, for the lord was a hero of empire and his public blessing for compulsory military training would surely be a vote-winner at the federal election due in April 1910. Here was a splendid opportunity to have the government’s defence initiatives endorsed at the highest level and perhaps even to sway the conservative waverers who were reluctant to approve the compulsory element.

Deakin’s official invitation was carefully worded: Kitchener was to advise ‘upon the best means of developing and perfecting the land defence of the country’. He was anxious to avoid any suggestion that Kitchener might be working to an imperial design. And the British military chief was surely aware of nationalist misgivings in Australia, particularly the ‘expeditionary force’ controversy so recently aired in the parliament.

But the British secretary of state for war, Richard Haldane, was not so careful with his words, as reported in the *Age*. Haldane had no doubt about

Kitchener's prime purpose: 'Wherever the theatres of war may be...we should have the forces of the Empire so organised that they can concentrate wherever the field may be, and that plans for our mutual defence may be worked out by one Empire, one whole.' Kitchener was going to Australia and then to New Zealand 'to work out the details', he said.¹⁶

How Deakin managed to evade the imperial thrust of Kitchener's intent remains something of a mystery. His biographer Judith Brett has documented his continuing ill health at this time, his seriously failing memory and fading sense of purpose. And yet he was still tilting for one final victory at the polls. Controversy around Kitchener was unwanted, particularly a controversy focussed, as it would be again, on the betrayal of a core principle set in law. Deakin would affirm the brief. He would wait, and watch.

Kitchener arrived in December 1909. His tour left no doubt about imperial fervour among loyalist Australians, ever ready to rise to the presence of a celebrated Briton, akin to an honorary royal. He was here for 'business not ceremony', as the *Sydney Morning Herald* put it, but throughout his entire tour of inspection, Kitchener was feted and celebrated by enthusiastic crowds, avenues of flags, bunting and palms; and, on some occasions, a crimson carpet was rolled out for the hero of the Sudan, the commander-in-chief of India, the great organiser of empire armies, to walk upon.

But if the imperial intention of Kitchener's tour was to be unstated, it was not ignored in the press. The *Sydney Morning Herald* asserted the Kitchener tour 'was not so much for Australia's sake as for the good of the Empire'. Australians might focus on home defence, 'but Lord Kitchener himself is probably regarding Australia as a detail in the great scheme of a coming world war.' And a little later, when the tour was nearing its end, the *Age* claimed that it was 'now admitted' that Kitchener's mission was as much about the preparation of an imperial field force as it was about preparation for local defence. According to the Melbourne daily, he was formulating a plan 'for "offence" as well as "defence"'. The intention, so the *Age* insisted, was to provide 'a great reserve of Australian soldiers...which can be fitted easily and swiftly into the secret plans of the War Office'.¹⁷

While the government had chosen to ignore Haldane's confirmation, both Deakin and Cook felt obliged, this time around, to release public statements

denying that Kitchener's mission had anything to do with preparation for an overseas war.

Kitchener's report was suitably headed to allay nationalist misgivings. 'Defence of Australia' offered a blueprint for a land defence and, less obviously, a framework for fighting abroad. The plan was sufficiently national to put suspicious minds at ease and sufficiently imperial in organisational matters to satisfy the politicians, like Cook, who wanted an army that could serve the empire whenever it might be imperilled.

The report contained a strategic assessment which confirmed the risk of invasion—something more than raids on ports and harbours, something more than London would concede—and it confirmed the possibility that the Royal Navy might not be able to confound such an eventuality. Thus, Australian land forces must have the strength and organisation to deal with such a crisis.

Had the report been shaped with public relations in mind, had it been designed to assuage the abandonment anxieties that so readily stirred in the Australian psyche, the preamble could not have been better calculated. There was no dodging, here, of what so many in the Commonwealth parliament believed was the hard reality.

Kitchener approved the compulsory military scheme and made suggestions for its enhancement, aiming for a trained force of eighty thousand men aged nineteen to twenty-five. As Deakin had planned, the great army chief supported preliminary training for boys as cadets, and for youths as recruits who would spend sixteen days annually in camp. He proposed an Australian military college and an exclusive Australian Staff Corps fully integrated into the Imperial General Staff, and he established a regime dominated by imperially oriented military men, notably his own staff officer Colonel George Kirkpatrick and William Throsby Bridges, the trusted man who would head the college.

Kitchener's scheme was a means of organising and training the young men of Australia in combat units established on the imperial pattern. The devil lay in the detail, as the military historian John Mordike explains:

When Kitchener's recommendations and comments are considered in conjunction with Haldane's earlier statement...about the purpose of the visit, one is drawn to the conclusion that the primary object of Kitchener's report was the organisation of a number of Australian units which would combine as brigades under the command of British generals and staff for overseas operations.¹⁸

‘Sit Down, Please’

In little more than a month, Kitchener saw more of Australia than most Australians see in their lifetime, and by the time he came to write his report he well knew the electoral mood. Through the governor of Western Australia, he sought a meeting with Senator George Pearce, Labor’s shadow minister for defence.

Pearce recalled this in *Carpenter to Cabinet*, written in the 1930s, shunned by publishers and finally published in 1951. The memoir is anecdotal and thin, and it entirely evades the sustained high seriousness of the author’s political life, but the account of the meeting with Kitchener highlights an important moment in the transformation of a nationalist Japanophobe to a loyalist defence minister.

At 10.55 a.m. Pearce was shown into a room in Government House and five minutes later Kitchener strode in, shook hands with him and said, ‘Sit down, please.’ The army chief provided advice on how to manage the transition from the old voluntary militia scheme to the new scheme for compulsory military training, and then he gave the minister the benefit of his views on the capabilities of certain officers: ‘the misfits and the inefficient’, as Pearce recalled. The lordly behaviour is caricatured in Labor style, but Pearce was profoundly impressed by Kitchener’s competence, by his report in general and his invasion scenario in particular. Even at this stage, it seems, Pearce was awakening to the imperial quid pro quo—that the price of white Australia’s security might be a major military commitment abroad, a call or a claim on the Commonwealth to bear the consequences of the imperial connection.¹⁹

As to the coming election, Kitchener’s information was good. In April 1910, the nation passed a severe judgement on Deakin’s opportunism and that of his anti-socialist allies in the Fusion government. Labor won a landslide victory in both the House of Representatives and the Senate. Fisher was once again prime minister. He boasted that Labor was the national party, and took great pride in the national undertakings that he and the labour movement had long proposed: the commencement of the national capital, the railway from Kalgoorlie to Port Augusta, a bigger and better pension scheme, a government bank to compete with the private banks and confound profiteering, and the acquisition of the Northern Territory in order

to people the north with Anglo-Saxons and end the shame of whites being outnumbered by Asians and Aborigines.

Fisher also took a personal interest in the symbols of nationhood, adding a sprig of wattle to the coat of arms and replacing the king's head with a kangaroo on Australia's postage stamps. But, for scope and earnestness *and* national intent, nothing quite matched the government's commitment to defence. In a major campaign speech prior to the election Fisher told an audience in Maryborough, Queensland, that his party was in parliament 'for the principle of white labour and defence'. And when, two months later, Labor took up the reins of government, the powerful triumvirate—Fisher, Hughes and Pearce—was in charge of defence policy.

Fisher's biographer observes that, had Deakin got his way, there would have been an Australian-funded dreadnought operating, like the New Zealand 'gift', somewhere in the North Sea. But Fisher's firm stance against this now freed his government to acquire, in addition to the ships Deakin had ordered, a further two submarines and a light cruiser, the latter to be built in Australia. This delayed the construction of the cruiser, as Australian shipwrights and tradesmen had to train in England for two years before work could commence at the Cockatoo Island shipyard in Sydney Harbour, but it did gift the nation the foundation of a naval shipbuilding industry.²⁰

Defence expenditure doubled in Labor's first year in office and thereafter continued to grow. Race fear trumped the party's class war and even brought political radicals, for the most part, into line. The likely enemy was Japan. Concern for the survival of white Australia impelled an uncharacteristic commitment—Labor men fiercely committed to democratic militarism.²¹ The party swung behind the triumvirate, and Pearce had little trouble convincing his colleagues to adopt the main features of Kitchener's report: an enhanced compulsory training scheme working towards a total fighting force of 127,000 by 1920, a plan for the military training college and, most importantly, a strategic assessment that hinged on Australia's peril in the Pacific and its continued dependence on Britain.

Pearce was no orator, not by the measure of Deakin or Hughes, but he was an efficient and diligent administrator able to advance the cause of his defence bill upon the Second Reading, on 18 August 1910. The timing fired his cause, for only days before, the Japanese had annexed Korea,

confirming, if confirmation was needed, their expansionist intent. 'There could not be a more inoffensive people than the Koreans,' Pearce told the Senate. 'But where are they as a nation to-day? They have been brought under the control of another country, which rules them with a rod of iron.'

Pearce affirmed the comfortable maxim that Australia was settled not conquered and thereafter kept safe by the British Navy. But, he argued, loss of naval supremacy had imposed a new order of peril on white Australia and, with that, a new responsibility to the empire:

The sound of the guns in Manchuria almost reached our ears recently, and the storm of war has been even nearer than that to our shores. We cannot prophesy that, in future, we are going to be as exempt from attack as we have been in the past. We also have to bear in mind that we are part of the British Empire; and, whilst the British Empire has been our source of protection in the past, still our connection with it carries the possibility of our being involved at any time in war with countries which have no immediate designs against ourselves. They may have designs against the Empire, of which we form a part, however, and consequently their attacks may be directed against us. There are great advantages in being under the protection of the British flag; but, while we have availed ourselves of those advantages fully in the past, we must be prepared in the future to take the disadvantages that come. One of those is that we may at any time be involved in a war in the causing of which we have had no voice, and in which we have no desire to take a part. But, nevertheless, by reason of the fact that we are part of the Empire, we may be called upon, willy nilly, to bear the consequences of our Imperial connection.

The defence minister may have had the anti-militarists and pacifists in his party in mind at this point, as he addressed the topic of international arbitration with some force:

I know that it is sometimes said that we of the Labour party profess to believe in arbitration for the settlement of international disputes. So we do. But...where is the nation that is prepared to arbitrate in the event of an international misunderstanding, either with us or with the British nation? Is Japan or China prepared to arbitrate with us about our Immigration Restriction Act? And, even if they were prepared to arbitrate on that question, of course, we are not.

Like many of the first Commonwealth parliamentarians, Pearce was an autodidact regularly given to demonstrating his wide reading. Early in his speech he quoted from Professor Ernest Scott's new *Terre Napoleon*. Towards the end of his speech he discoursed on a telling episode from pre-modern history:

In times long past in Peru, the people had realized a condition of Socialism. But a few armed invaders, under Spanish conquerors, swept over their country and overthrew their Socialism at a touch. Although the Peruvians outnumbered the Spaniards by a thousand to one, still the Spaniards possessed arms, and knew how to use them, whilst the Peruvians had no arms, or merely an army in name. The fate that overcame the Peruvians suffices to show that even a perfect social and industrial system, if not efficiently defended, may go down before an armed and trained invader.

The fate of the Peruvians (fellow socialists!) was meant as a sobering lesson, but as an analogy it was sufficiently remote to be, perhaps, a case of psychological displacement. It was a way of talking about a reality that was much closer to home and not entirely welcome in the forefront of the mind. Labor men occasionally spoke of the dispossession of the Aboriginal people with an alarming frankness as to the violence of the process—‘that race we have banished from the face of the earth’, as Hughes would say—and of what ‘that race’ had lost and what white Australians might lose.

The theme of banished races was popular in the invasion literature of the period, but mostly the national conversation rested easy with evasive tropes from turn-of-the-century parlour talk—the belief that Australia was settled not conquered, and the insistence on ‘natural laws’ whereby ‘doomed races’ gave way to superior blood, to more vigorous and progressive peoples, consistent with the principles of Social Darwinism.

Yet, lurking in the white Australian subconscious was the idea of a people relatively unarmed, thinly spread across a vast continent, a people who had been pushed aside, like the Peruvians. It was Deakin who had declared that until white Australians had a national defence they were ‘only tenants in this continent’ and as such could be readily evicted.²²

In 1910, Pearce’s ‘Peruvian’ warning led on to his finale:

Let me again...remind honorable senators that there is in Australia everything that could tempt an invader. We have here immense wealth, a comparatively empty land, both rich and fertile, vast possibilities of expansion, a genial climate, and everything that one can think of to make an invader envious.²³

‘Willy Nilly’

‘Whatever the result of a contest between Japan and America, there is nothing more certain than the brown and yellow races must come south in the course of time, and we may well pray that their migration may be postponed until such time as a great population in this continent and New Zealand shall give us some chance to resist the coming attack.’

Sydney Morning Herald, 28 January 1911

When Joseph Cook suggested in September 1909 that one day it might be necessary to send an Australian expeditionary army to support Britain in some other part of the world, the Labor leader, Andrew Fisher, jumped on the remark and pressed Cook into an indignant retreat. For good measure, Hughes followed up with one of his scathing broadsides. But a year later, Senator George Pearce said much the same thing as he commended Labor’s defence bill to the parliament and the comment passed with hardly a flutter: ‘By reason of the fact that we are part of the Empire,’ he said, ‘we may be called upon, *willy nilly*, to bear the consequences of our Imperial connection.’

In twelve months, a great deal had changed. Japan had confirmed its expansionist ambitions and its dominance in East Asia with ongoing colonial creep in Manchuria and the annexation of Korea. At the same time, the British surrender of naval supremacy in the Pacific was complemented by the German menace to Britain’s all-important security at home, while the proposal for a Pacific fleet remained at best an idea awaiting fulfilment. Both sides of the Commonwealth parliament shared the apprehension.

On Deakin's side, the barrister Paddy Glynn agreed with Sir William Lyne that 'there was scarcely a British cruiser between Vancouver and Cape Horn, or Cape Horn and the West Indies, [and] there was not a single British battleship in the Pacific within the region of Australian influence.' And for Labor, the new order of peril was much the same, as Hughes noted when he rose to endorse Pearce's defence bill. He spoke of a time when a 'more equable distribution' of the British navy secured the outer fringes of empire, a time long gone, for that equable situation 'has been so disturbed that there is now concentrated in Home waters nine-tenths of the great British fleet'.¹

The inescapable dilemma of unavoidable dependence and uncertain reliability was working its way into Labor's calculations. Whatever measures the government might embark upon in the sphere of national defence, one fundamental truth held firm: white Australia's existence hinged on Britain's survival, and in the event of an emergency—a great war arising from the German challenge, for example—then, 'willy nilly', Australia would have to bear the consequences of the imperial connection, as Pearce expressed it.

'Willy nilly' is an adverb meaning whether one likes it or not. It would appear that well before the Imperial Conference of 1911, when Labor would secretly commit the nation to the coming European war, the logic of the imperial quid pro quo was in play.

Abandonment anxiety was in the air and the scent was picked up in the press, sparking a round of crisis fever in articles and editorials surveying the new circumstances in Europe and the Pacific over the Australian spring and summer of 1910–11. When the new Japanese consul-general arrived in Sydney in October, reporters abandoned due courtesy and pressed him on the likelihood of a Japanese invasion.

The *Sydney Morning Herald* ran regular reviews on defence-related matters, noting that 'there is nothing more certain than the brown and yellow races must come south in the course of time.' The editorial page welcomed the idea of a permanent presence for the American fleet in the Pacific, marking a sudden indifference to the protocols attending British sensitivities.

Previously, in 1909, Deakin had followed up on his Great White Fleet success with a proposal for a 'Pacific pact', whereby the United States might become an active presence in the Pacific and the white nations of the

sphere extend the Monroe Doctrine to the western part of the ocean. The proposal came to nothing, but by 1911 Andrew Fisher had his own variation on this theme, arguing for a closer union between the British Dominions and the United States upon the waters of the Pacific—in the interests of peace and progress, as he put it. Like his predecessor, Fisher was casting about, trying to find a solution to a problem that was, for the time being, unsolvable.

The press coverage ranged from sober analysis to scaremongering. One column carried a Washington report, apparently composed by a senior officer in America's War Department, which claimed that the country's west coast was poorly defended and the Japanese could 'in thirty days land 200,000 men, seize and fortify the passes through the Rockies and get a foothold' from which it would take years and 'billions of monies to dislodge them'. The report was refuted by a counter-analysis detailing how such an invasion would be repulsed—but an invasion it was. In another column, the *Herald* warned of war for trade and territory between America and Japan. It acknowledged the value of the Anglo-Japanese alliance to Britain, and the unease it fostered in Australia: 'Friendly as we are with Japan, there is something unnatural in our present Oriental linking.'²

The *Herald* was well established as the city daily most anxious about the menace of Japan. But as David Sissons explains in his foundational study of race fear in the Commonwealth, these were years of 'considerable apprehension' and 'fear of Japan among the public at large'. The signs were more evident by the year—Tsushima, the British departing the Pacific, the conversion of the Labor Party from anti-militarism to 'democratic militarism', the dreadnought scare, Kitchener's confirmation of Australia's peril, the annexation of Korea, and regular critical talk among opinion leaders in the press and politics.³

Sissons also notes the unprecedented cluster of invasion scare literature (plays, serials and short stories) in the years 1908–11. And there were other signs too—frequent allegations of Japanese spying in Australia, the 'Doomsday' talk of leading politicians such as Ewing and Pearce, the bipartisan acceptance (at long last) of the urgent necessity for compulsory military training, the slippage in the direction of the imperial quid pro quo, declarations of concern from scholars of international affairs, and even the occasional presence of anti-Japanese sentiment in commercial

advertisements. All this was summoning what Alfred Deakin called ‘a remarkable change in the attitude of our people towards defence’.

If the national mindset did not amount to hysteria, it certainly amounted to a collective apprehension among the attentive public, and critics such as the Japanese consul-general and Bruce Smith, the maverick conservative in the House of Representatives, did not fail to denounce it.⁴

Managing the Troublesome Australians

One of the concerns behind the talk of Japanese invasion (or British betrayal) and the surge of anxious musings about the Pacific scene was the well-founded rumour that Anglo–Japanese talks were again underway with a view to renewal of the treaty—or was it a renunciation? Either way seemed to pose problems for Australia. Early renewal would confirm the long-term leverage of the Japanese in London. Renunciation would free the Japanese of obligation to the empire. Free them to turn, perhaps, to Germany.

The alliance was not due for renewal until 1915 but the British government was committed to locking it in for a further ten years, through to 1921. By January 1911 defence officials in London were hard at work to secure this outcome. They were conscious, too, of the forthcoming Imperial Conference, set for May. How to deal with this subject at the conference, and how to manage the troublesome Australians?

The secretary of the Committee of Imperial Defence wrote to the Foreign Office about his concerns in January 1911. He warned that the weight of the empire’s defence needs in the Pacific would fall more heavily on the Dominions if the alliance with Japan did not proceed. He thought the question of how to deal with the Australians a tricky matter: ‘Frankly I dread any sort of discussion with our brethren in Australasia on these delicate and secret topics...But—on the other hand—the last thing wanted is a howl from Australia or Canada, if and when the British government decide to renew the alliance.’⁵

The British prime minister, Herbert Asquith, and the Foreign Office agreed. The alliance was too important to be muddled or aggravated by Dominion critics, as Sir Arthur Nicolson made clear:

The maintenance of the Alliance is of such vital Imperial interest that its prolongation or otherwise should not be dependent on the view of the Dominions, and it is therefore one solely and exclusively for the Imperial Government to decide, without any reference to the Colonies. One of them may of course raise the question and if so, it might be desirable to explain the value of the Alliance...but the discussion should end there if possible. Meanwhile the decision in which the Prime Minister concurs, is that H. M. Government will not bring the matter before the Conference or discuss it there if it can be avoided.⁶

The British foreign secretary, Sir Edward Grey, supposed that some degree of consultation with the Dominion delegates at the forthcoming Imperial Conference was unavoidable and best done privately. He thought the Canadian prime minister, Wilfrid Laurier, understood what was at stake, but

One or two of the others, and certainly the Australians, require a good deal of education...The logical conclusion of denouncing the Alliance would be that Australia and New Zealand should undertake the burden of naval supremacy in [the] China seas. This they are neither willing nor able to do.⁷

In preparation for the business of persuasion, senior British ministers and the top brass, navy and military, determined carefully to calibrate the danger which Japan presented to Australia for the benefit of the Australian representatives. Several key position papers were prepared containing strategic assessments both real and hypothetical.

The historian John Mordike has examined the papers circulated among delegates ahead of the conference and the minuted conversations associated with their preparation. His work demonstrates a sharp eye for the strategies of persuasion at the centre of empire. Moreover, the record enabled him to follow the progress of key texts, in draft form, as the emphases were refined to effect. Mordike is also alive to the anxieties that the Australian delegates brought to London, along with their determination to have these anxieties assuaged. His findings are set out in *Army for a Nation: A History of Australian Military Developments, 1880–1914*, published in 1992, and ‘*We Should Do This Thing Quietly*’: *Japan and the Great Deception in Australian Defence Policy, 1911–14*, published in 2002.⁸

What is striking about the discussion at committee level is the political nature of the strategic assessment—how cautiously to express the security provided by the British navy, and what to say about Japan with a view to hastening Australian compliance with Britain’s preparations for war. A Committee of Imperial Defence memorandum suggested the conference provided the opportunity to ascertain whether the Dominions ‘would now be prepared to undertake certain definite responsibilities in connection with

the defence of the Empire as a whole'. And, if so, nominate 'the nature and strength of the force they might make available for such a purpose'.

Another committee paper, specifically requested by the Fisher Labor government, contained a review of Australia's strategic position. The title was arresting, to say the least: 'Australia and New Zealand: Strategic Situation in the Event of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance Being Determined'. In final form, it ran entirely contrary to an earlier draft by focussing not on the security of British naval cover but on its severe limits, and not on the unlikelihood of a Japanese invasion but on the possibility, in certain circumstances, of it, notably in the event that the alliance ended. Should the alliance be terminated or denounced, it was argued, this would have 'far-reaching effects on the position of Australia and New Zealand, and necessitate a reconsideration of the scale of probable attack on these Dominions'.⁹

The paper went on to argue that 'the possibility of Japan being ranged against us, either alone or in combination with some other naval Power, could not be prudently disregarded.' Nor could these southern Dominions disregard the possibility of a British fleet to the rescue being delayed by a hostile enemy in Europe, in which case 'it would no doubt be possible for Japan to convey overseas to Australia and New Zealand a military force of considerable size.'¹⁰

The advice from the chief of the Imperial General Staff, Sir William Nicholson, was not to overstate this possibility lest the Australians choose to focus on home defence at the expense of a contribution to the anticipated war abroad. The advice was taken on board and the report back-pedalled a little, advising that a 'large-scale' invasion of Australia or New Zealand was 'highly improbable' unless permanent command of the sea was somehow achieved by 'the fleets of Japan and her allies'. Thus a 'raid' as opposed to invasion was the more likely of the adverse possibilities. The committee sounded its warning:

In view of the fact that Japan has at her disposal an army of over 1,000,000 men available for service overseas, it is conceivable that she might take advantage of the temporary possession of the local command of the sea to dispatch a raiding force against Australia or New Zealand with the view to creating a diversion and effecting the maximum amount of damage within a brief space of time.

This moderated analysis, still with its reference to '1,000,000' Japanese soldiers, was leading to a predictable conclusion. Australia and New Zealand must continue to build their naval and military forces, with haste:

The whole strategic situation in the Far East, in the event of the possible termination of the Anglo-Japanese alliance, *whenever that event takes place*, will depend largely upon the extent to which Australia and New Zealand find it possible to develop their respective contributions to the naval forces of the Empire.¹¹

In addition to naval preparation, ‘the most effective deterrent to raids would be an adequate and efficient military force so organized as to be capable of dealing with such raiding attacks with the least possible delay.’

In the first week of the Imperial Conference the delegates, having studied the key documents, attended a meeting of the Committee of Imperial Defence, a private session under ‘a veil of confidence’, at which they were treated to an address by the foreign secretary. Sir Edward Grey’s speech was a comprehensive statement of British foreign policy and a momentous occasion for the Dominions for he conceded, at long last, the right to consultation in matters concerning the defence of the empire—a voice at the centre, a seat at the inner counsels, what Deakin had so often sought and been denied. Circumstances had changed, Grey confirmed:

The creation of separate Fleets has made it essential that the Foreign Policy of the Empire should be a common policy. If it is to be a common policy, it is obviously one on which the Dominions must be taken into consultation, which they must know, which they must understand, and which they must approve; and it is the hope and belief that the Foreign Policy of this country does command the assent and approval, and is so reasonable that it must command the assent and approval of the Dominions, that we wish to have a consultation, and I wish to explain, as fully as I can, the present situation of Foreign Affairs.¹²

Grey reviewed the situation in Europe, the rise of the German ‘Napoleonic’ policy, the threat to British naval supremacy and its implications for the Dominions; but he did not dwell on the German threat to British security.

The foreign secretary was making his way, for the benefit of the Australians in particular, to the case for the renewal of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. He affirmed that the Japanese had been ‘good allies’. They had never ‘strained that alliance’, nor had they ‘asked for anything of any kind which was not well within the terms of the alliance’. He spoke forcefully of the urgent necessity for the alliance to be affirmed and extended.¹³

The strategic case for the alliance, Grey told the delegates, was simple enough. If it were abandoned, Britain could not match Japanese naval power in the Pacific. A massive burden of self-defence would fall upon the Dominions and so, he argued: ‘In the interests of strategy, in the interest of

naval policy expenditure, and in the interests of stability, it is essential that the Japanese alliance should be extended.'

Grey assured the delegates that their immigration policy was safe, that the Japanese government could be trusted, that Japan would not press its people upon any nation that did not want them. And he raised the possibility of a terrible alternative—that in the event the alliance faltered, for whatever reason, Japan 'at once would look, and be bound to look, at what other arrangements she could make with other Powers to secure her position'. The spectre of a German–Japanese alliance was abroad, yet again. No other contingency was more likely, from a Dominion perspective, to free the Japanese to do their worst in the Pacific, while leg-roping the British to home defence.

Under the 'veil of confidence' at an inner counsel of empire, the Australians had been consulted and their support canvassed, and they readily gave it. Fisher and Pearce were as one. They agreed that a renewal of the alliance was the best way forward. There was really no other way to go, the 'Oriental linking' both unnatural *and* inescapable.

But there was one great compensation to come out of the meeting: the secretary of state for foreign affairs had made the unprecedented promise of consultation in the future. He had asked for Australia's support for the alliance, giving at least the appearance that responsibility for foreign policy could be shared—though, regardless of the Dominion position, the British were clearly hell-bent on renewing the alliance. And, regardless of their acquiescence, the Labor leadership would continue to distrust the alliance, while noting that British consultation with Japan had clear and present priority over consultation with the Dominions.

Grey concluded his presentation by opening the meeting to discussion. The Dominion delegates asked no questions about the European situation, and the Australian delegates turned immediately to the subject of Japan. George Pearce was habitually concerned with Japanese infiltration of Australia's north and the 'barrier' islands of the Pacific. Only a year previously, he had accused the Japanese of having spies tour the northern parts of Australia, an accusation for which he could produce no evidence when challenged by the Japanese consul in Sydney. Now he wanted to know if the Foreign Office 'had any information as to what is being done in New Caledonia with regard to Japanese immigration'.

Grey could only reply to the question with a question: did Pearce have any information on this subject? Yes, said Pearce. The Japanese had formerly sent 'coolie class' workers to New Caledonia to work in the mines but now, 'systematically', they were sending 'large numbers of engineers who have served in the army, and are of a superior class'. The 'superior class' of Japanese had always been the real problem, as Deakin had affirmed as far back as 1901. Now, according to Pearce, up to three thousand of them were embedded in this major island group. Fisher backed up his defence minister. He assured those present that the Japanese were placing their people in the smaller islands of the Pacific, too.

The British prime minister queried Pearce's use of the term 'systematic'. Pearce did not resile. He replied that the coolies were being displaced 'systematically by a superior class of Japanese, men who had served in the Japanese army, many of whom are civil engineers and men of higher education'.

Asquith: 'You think that these civil engineers come there for some other purpose than mining?'

Pearce: 'Yes.'¹⁴

The Secret Pact

Just as the British had prepared well in advance of the conference for the management of the Australians in naval matters, so they had also prepared for the management of the Australians in the military sphere. Securing a commitment to an expeditionary force for service to the empire abroad had been a primary goal since the foundation of the Commonwealth: from the earliest debates over the original defence bill to the subsequent 'arm-wrestle' with Hutton and, thereafter, the tensions around this issue in defence administration, the Commonwealth parliament and successive cabinets, all the way to the investigative tour by Lord Kitchener. And then...

Six months after Kitchener submitted his report, in August 1910, senior staff in the War Office in London were discussing the forthcoming opportunity at the Imperial Conference to speak frankly to the Dominions about the necessity to plan for war, and the necessity for Dominion contributions to an Imperial military force, organised and trained to fuse with the British army.

The problems discussed were several: Dominion forces were in a 'very imperfect and almost embryonic condition'; they were established as a citizen force, which meant that 'only a proportion of the forces would be available for operations overseas'; and there was also the question of Dominion autonomy—the 'constitutional difficulty' that meant Britain was unable to dictate to the Dominions on defence matters. The colonies might be half slave but the Dominions were more than half free. They were free to decide on the degree of their military commitment, if any commitment at all. Thus, there was a need to prepare, well in advance; a need to have the Dominions commit and 'bind themselves to concerted action in matters over which there is not united jurisdiction'.¹⁵

The War Office hoped to find a way round these problems in the course of the socialising, the wining and dining, the speechifying and conferring, both in the glare of the open sessions and in the sessions held under a 'veil of confidence'. The paper dealing with this difficult challenge was titled 'The Co-operation of the Military Forces of the Empire'. Its objective was to 'define with some precision the different theatres in which, and to a certain extent the different times at which, we might require [military] assistance from the Dominions'.

They might be more easily persuaded if the commitment were confined to their 'regions of interest' but, as one War Office chief noted, 'the real truth of the matter is, that in order to get full value out of such assistance as the Dominions may elect to give us, their troops should be placed under the orders of the War Office (C.I.G.S.) and made available for service in any part of the world.'¹⁶

The pre-conference discussions at the highest levels recognised the sensitivity of the issue, particularly in Australia, and concluded that extreme caution and careful wording were necessary. In its final formulation, the paper presented at the conference was quite different. The wording was vague, suggesting the Dominions might deploy not too far from their own shores, while a paragraph which mentioned the possibility of war in 'North-Western Europe' (precisely where war was expected) was deleted.

The paper also contained a reworked paragraph on mutual assistance, its not-so-mutual formulation massaged into something more balanced. It acknowledged 'a reciprocity of obligation on the part of the Dominions to render if need be, in proportion to their resources, the same assistance to the United Kingdom as they expect the United Kingdom to render to them'.¹⁷

At the heart of the paper was an appeal to the Dominions to ready for war: an insistence on the necessity to prepare well in advance for 'combined movements by land and sea, involving the accurate solution to large problems of time and space'. The paper noted the considerable logistical challenge of sending even a 'small expeditionary force from the UK' to deal with, for example, 'a minor campaign against a semi-civilized enemy'. So, 'how much more essential must this care and attention be, before engaging in a struggle with a Great Power or combination of Powers'. And in such a struggle the assistance of the Dominions would most definitely be required. All in all, the imperial bias in the paper was still glaringly evident.

The paper concluded that each Dominion had 'certain natural spheres of action' and emphasised, yet again, the autonomy of the self-governing nations within the empire, the decision in their hands. The sooner that decision was made, the better; the sooner 'the details of organization, command, armament, equipment and training' could be handed over to the Imperial General Staff and 'definite plans of action elaborated'.¹⁸

Late in the conference, on Wednesday, 14 June, George Pearce was to attend a meeting in the War Office. Its proceedings were conducted in secret, chaired by the chief of the Imperial General Staff, Sir William Nicholson. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the co-operation of the military forces of the empire. As Pearce was late—he had the wrong starting time—an initial conversation proceeded without him, between Sir Frederick Borden, the Canadian defence minister, and Nicholson.

Borden expressed the view that the paper on 'Mutual Co-operation' was overly biased in favour of British as opposed to Dominion security, and that bias would not be acceptable to the Canadian public. He wanted a shift of emphasis, in addition to carefully worded statements of principle, so the paper would attend as much to how British troops might assist Canada or Australia in their hour of need as to how Dominion troops might assist British forces. He wanted a balanced expression of mutual obligation throughout. This was particularly important, he said, as the Canadian government was 'under the shadow of an impending general election'. Nicholson agreed that the paper must be further amended, to make it more palatable for the Dominion constituency.

At that point, Pearce arrived and took his seat. Unlike his Canadian counterpart, he had no qualms with the paper in its present form. He

indicated that the proposal would be approved by the Australian prime minister, and that the Fisher government was eager to know more about the 'natural spheres' and ready to embark upon planning for contingencies to avoid any need for hurried improvisation. He wanted an indication of 'what might be required, so our Local Staffs could be directed to give consideration to what the Imperial Staff has said on these points as to all our local spheres'.

Borden agreed, with one proviso. Political conditions in Canada, he said, 'make it undesirable that such matters should be discussed openly'.

'I do not propose that either,' said Pearce.

Borden and Pearce were agreed on the need for secrecy. In fact, as this apparently quite complete record indicates, Pearce then affirmed that the Australians had first posed the question of mutual co-operation to the War Office with confidentiality in mind—well away from the open sessions at the conference. 'We were asking them to tell us what in Australia they considered to be our sphere of action,' he explained, and that was not a subject for public scrutiny.

The meeting ended on that note, and further changes to the wording of the paper were formulated and edited in that night.

The amended paper was discussed at a second meeting in the War Office, on Saturday, 17 June. Pearce came with a prepared statement. He reminded those present that Australia's military forces were maintained for 'local defence' and the defence act allowed for nothing else—but, in the event of any serious war, any number of patriotic Australian men might volunteer. That being so:

It seemed to us that our local General Staff ought to know what is in the minds of the Imperial General Staff as regards what use such forces should be put to so that they could be employed in their various Dominions in arranging schemes for mobilisation or transportation of such troops, and so that they would be guided in preparation of such a scheme by the general idea that the Imperial Staff had as to the use to which such troops could be put.

The Canadian minister was not anxious to press for such detail, but Pearce persisted, insisting the Australians were well on the way to uniformity with imperial standards with respect to equipment and training, and yet 'there is something more than that to be done,' he said. He called for the 'preparation of schemes of mobilisation by local sections of the Imperial General Staff in order to enable that uniformity to be availed of'.

George Pearce had offered to commit Australia to prepare an expeditionary force for imperial undertakings abroad, 'breaking previously untouched ground in Australia's relationship with Britain', as John Mordike notes.

There is no evidence that Sir William Nicholson had any forewarning of this remarkable proposal, and he was not about to let it slip by. He pressed the Australian defence minister to be sure there was no mistaking his apparent meaning. He checked that Pearce did indeed mean a force for 'overseas action'. Nicholson was pleased to have the offer confirmed.

There was clearly an understanding that secrecy was required, not least because Pearce had contravened the spirit if not the letter of his own defence act. Nicholson led the way: 'It is much better to hold our tongues about it and not say anything according to the old Persian proverb "What two ears only hear, God himself does not know."'

Pearce then said that the Australian general staff would begin work and the plans would be sent to the War Office when completed; but all present were well aware that the nationalist and anti-militarist constituencies in the Dominion parliaments were a concern. Again, Nicholson led the way: 'I think it is much better we should do this thing quietly without any paper on the subject, because I am sure in some of the Dominions it might be better not to say anything about preparations.'

'It gives mischievous people an opportunity to talk,' said Sir Frederick Borden.

'I quite recognise that, and I suppose we have as large a proportion of that kind of people in Australia as there are anywhere else,' said Pearce.

Nicholson suggested that the War Office paper on 'Mutual Co-operation' be withdrawn from the conference papers.

'Suppressed or withdrawn—I would hope so,' said Borden, and Pearce agreed, but with one qualification: the paper was to be withdrawn 'on the understanding that it will be acted on'.

No report of these discussions was published in the proceedings of the Imperial Conference of 1911. However, proof copies of the transcript of the secret War Office meetings were printed and one, Nicholson's, was eventually placed on file in the War Office. Eighty years later, John Mordike found it while researching War Office preparations for the First World War. There was, he writes, 'no public knowledge' of the secret meetings until his book *An Army for a Nation* was published, in 1992.¹⁹

Why Commit?

The public response in Australia to the conference was guarded but positive. The Anglo–Japanese alliance would at least provide what Hughes called ‘breathing space’ for Australia to continue to build its naval and military forces. Similarly, Fisher was intent upon making political mileage at home out of the breakthrough in consultation. Hitherto, the Dominions had not been consulted on Britain’s treaty negotiations with other big powers. Here was success where Deakin had repeatedly failed. Fisher trumpeted his team’s achievement, the delegates having had the opportunity to ‘discuss the affairs of the Empire as they affect each and all of us’, he told the press.²⁰

But Fisher knew all too well that progress on this front was elusive and uncertain, for the British government’s freedom of action remained essentially unqualified, just as the British navy remained essentially absent from the Pacific. The more telling outcome was the secret commitment to prepare for a European war. Why had Australia’s minister of defence made this commitment on behalf of the Labor government?

The confidential pact contains a persuasive logic when we consider the fears that were building in Australia prior to the conference and the limited faith—on Australia’s part—in the alliance or, to be more precise, in Japan. A number of considerations dovetailed to underpin the decision: the Australians at the conference were apprised of the long-term alliance that Britain was pursuing; they understood that Japan, ensconced with Britain and ever more tightly and vitally tied into British strategic needs, would have long-term leverage in London. The fear was as much about a diplomatic menace as a military one, and it compelled the Australian government to respond, to bind tighter to the imperial centre.

To commit to war abroad was to acknowledge that Australia would fight—literally fight—for its White Australia policy, anywhere. The government had doubled defence expenditure in quick time and it would double again almost as quickly, but defence was not enough; diplomacy was essential, too—no skin in the game, no say at the table. In years to come this would figure in Billy Hughes’s fanatical commitment to conscription for service overseas. And there were further considerations, with both sides committed to the business of persuasion: for Australia, the expeditionary promise would involve the full co-operation of the British while the newly

committed nation quietly retained, at least in principle, its sovereign right upon the occasion to choose what to defend and where to fight.

The British position, similarly, had its unstated elements, evident in the course of the conference consultations: play up the Japanese threat and the Australians will expedite their defence preparations, for they will readily pay up and prepare to safeguard white Australia. And when the time comes, with war in Europe, *willy nilly*, they will be there.

At the highest levels of the Australian government, deep-sunk anxieties prompted the nation's sentinels to cling tighter to empire. Byzantine cogitations came down to that simple equation: distrust of Britain, fear of Japan.

‘No White Man Worthy of the Name’

George Burns: ‘Does the honorable member believe that we should be under the protection of Japan?’

Alfred Conroy: ‘Certainly not. What a stupid, silly question to ask any one.’

William Finlayson: ‘That is Winston Churchill’s idea.’

Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates, 16 April 1914

George Pearce came home from the Imperial Conference by way of Russia and Japan, where he noted that Japanese industry and armament proclaimed a readiness for war. In his public utterances thereafter, he would cite his first-hand experience, the evidence he had gained, reminding his audience that while Europe was a month’s journey from the Commonwealth, it took just eight days to ship from Japan to Australia.

Not everyone was persuaded in all regards. Opponents of the compulsory military scheme were a force in the labour movement, if not the parliamentary Labor Party. When Pearce addressed a town-hall meeting at Broken Hill, in western New South Wales, he was heckled by miners’ union men who shouted their opposition to the government’s defence policy and to compulsion in particular:

A voice: ‘Hired murderers.’

Senator Pearce: ‘They’re not hired murderers.’

A voice: ‘They’re forced to serve.’

Senator Pearce: ‘They are made to perform a duty which they owe their country. Japan today is an arsenal from beginning to end—for what? For international arbitration? No! For something in the future. Every country in the world bar this favoured land has felt the curse of war upon its shores.

What guarantee had they that peace will continue. Australians must be prepared to fight for a White Australia. That time might come and men must be trained for it. No white man worthy of the name could refrain from defending his country and his womenfolk against the Asiatic. Industrially and politically the Asiatic is far behind Australia, and men who are Australians do not or should not want to be brought down to the level of Asiatics.’¹

Pearce was one among many in the federal parliament who felt that an alliance with Japan was preferable to no alliance at all, but equally that Australians could not take comfort in a false sense of security. Reluctant acceptance of the alliance was grounded in the uncomfortable realisation that Australia’s security was contracted out to an Asian powerhouse which had proved itself, in recent times, to be expansionist and predatory.²

Conservatives in the parliament were more inclined to keep their doubts to themselves, but on the government side there were radicals who saw militarism in the guise of defence and who felt obliged to speak out. One of these was a senior Labor man, a respected figure in the party hierarchy, William Guy Higgs, member for Capricornia, an Anglican with a strong religious streak that he had formerly channelled into unionism.

In August 1912, Higgs’s concerns were expressed against the background of another ‘Morocco crisis’ in which the great powers—France, Germany and Britain—confronted one another, declaring their incorruptible motives while rattling sabres, and finally settling on one of those compromises whereby one power would concede a little here and another power concede a little there, the trade-off confined, this time, to territory in Africa.³ But prior to the settlement it was rumoured that compensation for Germany would be found in the Pacific, with British acquiescence, and this rumour ignited age-old fears going back to the New Guinea ‘betrayal’ of the 1880s and, more recently, British sponsorship of Japanese power.⁴

Higgs drew the attention of the parliament to Japan’s new dreadnought cruiser, which had been launched at the shipyards at Barrow-in-Furness, a mighty steelmaking and shipbuilding centre on the Lancashire coast. ‘When completed, the *Kongo* will carry the largest guns of any ship in the world,’ said Higgs. He wished the House to take note: Britain was supplying ‘our possible enemies with warships of that kind’, and he observed that the Eastern menace was being used to justify a huge military expenditure on the part of the Commonwealth. The Japanese, he said, were only partly to blame:

Does anybody think that Japan would be able to get into a position where she might be dangerous to us or to any other Power if it were not for the money kings and the money lords...who are prepared to lend millions of money to Japan for war purposes, and who are prepared, possibly as shareholders of Messrs. Vickers, Sons and Maxim, and Armstrong, Whitworth and Company in England, to build Dreadnoughts to be armed with guns superior to those that are to be found on British warships...Is this not a travesty?... Are we, a presumably sane people, going to allow that kind of thing?⁵

Another speaker that day was Dr William Maloney, the Labor member for Melbourne, who had been warning of invasion and calling for a 'White Ocean Policy' for the Pacific since 1905. He began by pointing out that he was once a republican (pro-Boer!) but his visit to Japan and the Far East in 1904 had transformed the pattern of his allegiances. His tour had convinced him of the desperate need for 'the firm and strong links that bind us to the Home Land', and for an empire fleet in the Pacific, for only with that fleet could they prevent Australians from 'becoming German helots or Japanese slaves'. At the same time, it would appear that Maloney was not at all confident that the promise of the fleet in the Pacific would come true in time to save Australia, should the worst come to the worst:

If England were to go down, the result would be disastrous to the Anglo-Celtic-Saxon race all the world over, whether they were living under the Stars and Stripes, the Union Jack, or the Australian flag. If England were only injured in the northern seas, we should be rendered helpless against one of the greatest fighting nations the world has ever known. I shall never utter a word derogatory of the Japanese as a nation...[but] what could we do unaided against such a nation?⁶

Enter Churchill

The Moroccan crisis had ended peacefully but the signs from London were not comforting. The naval arms race was renewed; the battleship-building rivalry was forging ahead; the British government was focussed ever more single-mindedly on the German challenge, and Winston Churchill was now the First Lord of the Admiralty—the civilian head of the Royal Navy.

Earlier in his political career, Churchill had scarce time for the glories of the navy, allegedly citing its 'traditions' as little more than 'rum, sodomy and the lash'. As an English liberal, his substantial arguments for the constraint of defence spending and his opposition to the dreadnought campaign were simple enough: the money was needed for reforms such as old-age pensions. The Admiralty was demanding six new dreadnoughts a year to meet the German challenge. Critics such as Lloyd George argued for no more than four. 'We compromised on eight,' Churchill quipped.

Now, as the head of the Admiralty, Churchill was a man transformed, a passionate convert to the Admiralty doctrine—all that mattered was the augmentation of the British fleet and its gathering about the heart of the empire, the defence of the British Isles, a fleet strong enough to destroy the German navy in one great, decisive battle in the North Sea, and to blockade and starve Germany into submission. He considered secondary obligations such as the security of the Dominions of little consequence.

In private Churchill expressed the view that the Dominions' aspiration to have their own little navies was 'thoroughly vicious'. He believed these nations should support his policy, forgo their inconsequential ambitions and help fund the rapid growth of the Royal Navy. Publicly he was not so blunt, not yet. He declared some advantage in a division of labour whereby Britain guarded the homeland while the unpersuaded Dominions patrolled their far-flung lands, and in the meantime he set about scotching the vision of the Pacific fleet.

In mid-1912, he persuaded the conservative Canadian prime minister, Robert Borden, to come on board. Churchill argued that Canada could best serve imperial defence by funding three British battleships for the Mediterranean. Borden agreed, and with that the Pacific fleet policy was dead in the water. Despite the promises made at the Imperial Conference, there had been no discussion with the affected parties—the other Dominions. Thereafter, the First Lord of the Admiralty was ever more blunt in his public pronouncements about the hard choices facing both Britain and the Dominions in the South Seas. 'And thus,' Neville Meaney writes, 'in a crisis situation British necessity without one word of consultation had overridden and nullified a clear imperial compact.'⁷

Andrew Fisher responded to the Canadian decision with restraint, seeing no advantage, for now, in condemning Britain. He set about building closer defence ties with New Zealand, telling the press that Australia 'was more vulnerable against a foe than any other part of the British Empire'.⁸ New Zealand, feeling similar pangs of abandonment, responded warmly. Arrangements were made for the respective defence chiefs to meet and plan for closer naval ties and for the raising of a joint division of some sixteen to eighteen thousand men. As Douglas Newton shows in his book *Hell-Bent*, in the months following, this venture evolved into a full-blown plan for an Australasian expeditionary force for offensive action abroad, since 'a defensive attitude of a purely passive nature' would be 'ineffectual'.⁹

A Dominion version of the Pacific fleet was still a hope. Fisher consulted the commander-in-chief of the Australian Naval Station, Admiral Sir George King-Hall, and soon after, the two men addressed a packed town hall in Melbourne for the lord mayor's dinner on 10 November 1912. They spoke at length about defence. King-Hall endorsed Fisher's sense of Australia's unique vulnerability. Having in mind his Admiralty background, a cynic might conclude that the commander was playing up Australia's worst fears, but he was by no means in step with Churchill. King-Hall confirmed that the British navy was 'practically confined to the vicinity of Home waters'. And he declared the White Australia policy vulnerable, so long as the nation was lightly peopled.

'It seems unlikely,' he said, 'that this magnificent country would not someday be coveted if left so empty, by other nations, whose people were overflowing the brim of their own countries.' Australia 'might be lost as easily as it had been gained if care was not taken to safeguard it (Cheers)'. King-Hall endorsed the Commonwealth's expansive naval policy, saying it was 'helping the old country to preserve the high road on the sea and safeguard the integrity of the Empire'.

In reply, Fisher said he 'felt his heart warm' as he listened to the admiral. He was in full agreement that Australia was

a great white population situated in the Southern Pacific, far removed from the Mother Country, that centre of enterprise, of power, and lying between Australia and the other white nations of the world were great nations, great in themselves, but with ideals which were not British ideals...While yet there was time Australia must take thought, and prepare for the worst emergency, still keeping the lively hope that peace would prevail.¹⁰

Fisher also observed that if certain British 'statesmen' would take the trouble to visit Australia they might better understand the nation's situation, to the advantage of all concerned. But that was a pipedream. The solution, and the prime minister knew it, was independent national action. He was perhaps, at that moment, closer to what we might call the Deakin national spirit than he had ever been. In the wake of Churchill's scuttling of the Pacific fleet solution, the Labor government was aiming to further expand the Australian navy.

In 1910, Fisher and Pearce had moved on the naval front as Deakin had on the military. They invited an expert from Britain, and Admiral Sir Reginald Henderson took the assignment: to report 'on all measures to be taken, both forthwith and in the future, in the formation of the [Australian]

fleet'. Henderson was an unusual Admiralty product. He appreciated Australia's national aspirations and her Pacific concerns, including the axiom that the Japanese alliance could not alone guarantee Australian security.

His report was submitted to the government in March 1911 and to the parliament in September. It was an ambitious vision, recommending a twenty-two-year building program to create an Australian navy consisting of fifty-two ships, including eight battle cruisers, ten light cruisers, eighteen destroyers, three depot ships and a fleet-repair ship, the contingent to be located in western and eastern waters and supported by new naval bases around the continent.¹¹

Pearce had initially hoped the program might be moderated, somewhat, by the presence of the Pacific Imperial Fleet, but Canada's about-turn and Churchill's subsequent conduct at the Admiralty compelled the government to go it alone. By 1913, the defence minister and his cabinet colleagues were ready to endorse a massive expansion of naval-defence spending, a revised plan based on the Henderson report.

The radical-nationalist press, notably the *Sydney Bulletin*, had the scent of what it called 'British betrayal' more or less permanently in its nostrils, but at this moment the resentment was particularly sharp:

If Australia isn't ready to fight for its White Australia policy, and if Britain doesn't care to take up the question, which, as the greatest nigger power on earth, it can hardly do with any enthusiasm, then there is an end to White Australia, with its glories and its dreams and its unique opportunities.

Like Mr Higgs, the Labor member for Capricornia, the *Bulletin* was strident in its condemnation of Britain's part in the modernisation of her protégé, Japan, and ever fearful of the latter nation's intentions, regardless of the alliance:

A time is liable to come when Japan will cheerfully risk two million soldiers in the conquest of Australia—and they are no poor specimens in the military line. Now that Britain has abandoned the job of policing the seas and has been driven to gather its fleet closely round its own coasts, the chance [for Japan] to fight for the possession of Australia may not be so very remote after all.¹²

About this time Pearce had privately expressed his own frustration and resentment over Britain's failure to honour its obligations as agreed in 1909. In the New Year both he and Fisher went public with their disappointment.¹³ The mainstream press picked up on the political mood, with editorials and leaders pointing out the dangers and issuing ominous

warnings, but Churchill was unmoved. In his naval-estimates speech to the Commons on 26 March 1913, he took the opportunity to clarify both his commitment to the doctrine of naval concentration and his contempt for the ‘colonial ships’ and ‘local navies’ of the Dominions. He claimed Britain was bearing ‘the whole burden of Imperial defence’ and it could not go on:

We have done, and are doing, our duty, and more than our duty, to the Empire as a whole. We are confronted with a great preoccupation in European waters in consequence of which we are making naval preparations hitherto unequalled in peace time...It therefore behoves the Overseas Dominions to make exertions for their own and for the common security, whether by what are called local navies, or by what, in the Admiralty view, is more effectual, by additions to the Imperial Navy. It behoves them to make exertions by the one method or the other to preserve, restore, or increase the world-wide mobility of the Imperial Fleet.¹⁴

That Foothold We Now Have

In the midst of these unnerving months, Fisher and his ministers, politicians and distinguished personages from all around the nation gathered with the governor-general, Lord Denman, to lay the foundation stone for Canberra. It was 12 March 1913.

The site of the ceremony was hardly more than a vast sheep run. There was a dais for the governor-general and the official party, and a grandstand, seating for five hundred invited guests, and units of Light Horsemen and Lancers were there too, in full regalia. There was a Luncheon Tent, a Gentleman’s Tent and a Ladies Retiring Tent, lest the heat and the dust be too much. The speeches were uplifting. They were grand. But Billy Hughes was not about to let the moment pass without a sombre warning.

Perhaps the view across the deforested grazing land prompted thoughts of banishment or annihilation, for that was his theme at the outset. He saw in the destruction of the Aborigines a dark premonition for white Australia. Linking the destinies of Australia and the United States, Hughes spoke of promise and ruin:

It affords everyone here, I feel perfectly sure, a very great pleasure to take part in this historic ceremony. We are here, so far as we can, to mould the destinies of a nation... The Deity has fashioned us out for this purpose from the beginning. We were destined to have our own way from the beginning and America—two nations that have always had their way, for they killed everybody to get it. I declare to you that in no other way shall we be able to come to our own except by preparing to hold that which we have now (Cheers). We are here as visible signs of a continent. We have a great future before us. The people are incapable of nourishing abstract ideals. They must have a symbol. Here we have a symbol of nationality...The first historic event in the history of the Commonwealth

we are engaged in today without the slightest trace of that race we have banished from the face of the earth. We must not be too proud lest we should, too, in time disappear. We must take steps to safeguard that foothold we now have (Cheers).¹⁵

The Labor government's grip on power was shakier than that of the white race upon the continent. At the federal election of May 1913, it was defeated by Cook's Liberal Party, the party created by Deakin in the course of Fusion and the major realignment in 1910. Deakin had retired, departing from the parliament in January, citing an alarming failure of memory along with other ailments. His last political act was to support Cook against Forrest, casting the deciding vote for the Liberal Party leadership, twenty votes to nineteen.¹⁶

Cook won the federal election by the slimmest of margins, and with a one-seat majority in the House of Representatives and a Labor majority in the Senate he had little chance to implement his program. The uncertainty extended to the strategic situation, where the press was stirring public concern in response to Churchill's failure to grasp the Australian sense of peril in the Pacific. In the interregnum between the election of 3 May 1913 and Cook's swearing-in as prime minister, late in June, the *Sydney Morning Herald* ran a series of alarmist articles written by professors and prominent journalists on the subject of Japan and the white race.

Familiar themes were canvassed in colourful language: the West to blame for the 'awakening' of the East; the transformation of the East from stagnation to dynamism, from victim to predator; the sheer weight of numbers—the 'fecundity of the East'; the Pearsonian vision of Western decline and Eastern ascendancy—the Japanese in the forefront of this great turnabout; the feminising influences of decadent Western life as against the martial virility of the Asiatic—the 'dry rot that comes with luxury and ease'; the lessons of history—'the yawning abyss into which nations and races vanish'; and the necessity 'if the white race is to be saved, especially in the Pacific' to reverse this trend, get back to the land and reclaim the mantle of virile manhood.

One startling *Herald* essay was titled 'How Japan Will Win'. The author summarised the dramatic rise of the East:

Out of oceans of anguish they have come in triumph, having defied plagues, pestilence, and famine; battle, murder and sudden death; heat, cold, and decimation; and today the Oriental stands as a monument of endurance beyond any mortal known to man. The man of the East has proved his capacity to adapt himself to all circumstances, and, therefore, his fitness to live. He can underlive, and therefore he can outlive, any Occidental. This inherent ability of the man from Asia is in itself

sufficient to preclude the domination of the world by Western races, and to lead some to ask whether the future does not belong to the East.¹⁷

Talk of the East, consistent across the series, was really proxy talk of Japan, ‘the only [Eastern] nation that has the command of the sea, and can carry its threat to the doors of nations round the Pacific’.¹⁸

Public concern was matched by pressure within the parliament. Cook responded by seeking an imperial defence conference but got no satisfaction from London on that score. In the latter part of 1913 he faced repeated questions in the House from members who wanted clarification on imperial policy and whether or not a conference might be had.

Cook was a conservative imperialist with a deep attachment to the Mother Country. For a time, he had found it unthinkable that Britain would not honour its pledge. He wanted to believe that the North Sea policy did not mean the abandonment of the Pacific commitment of 1909. Preparation for the budget made some clarification essential, but clarification was slow in coming. Finally, late in 1913, the Admiralty responded through the Colonial Office, confirming that changed circumstances had caused ‘their Lordships in the interests of the Empire unwillingly to defer carrying the arrangements [of 1909] into effect in the precise form contemplated’.

The wording suggested a mere adjustment to the agreement, but these were weasel words and the true meaning was clear. The agreement was sunk. The Admiralty forwarded a chart on the naval strength of other nations in ‘eastern seas’, Japan not included, and it was argued that the 1909 arrangement had grossly over-catered for defence requirements given the absence of danger in that sphere.

Cook was forced, at last, to take a stand. His long reply spelled out the Australian position. He argued that ‘local superiority’ in the Pacific was just as important as the ‘general superiority’ of Britain at the heart of the empire, and while Britain was content to rely on Japan in the Pacific, Australians considered Japan to be the problem. Meaney summarises the impasse in *The Search for Security in the Pacific, 1901–14*:

Australia would not, as a general rule, allow its Pacific interests to be treated as dispensable or given a second priority in order to meet a challenge in the North Sea; Britain, on the other hand, insisted on leaving the care of British interests in the Far East to its ally, Japan, so that a maximum defence effort could be concentrated around the Home islands.¹⁹

In Estimates, the treasurer, Sir John Forrest, expressed the conservative bewilderment about imperial policy:

The Commonwealth has been active in providing its [naval] unit...But for some reason or other, of which the present Government is unaware, two units of similar strength on the China and East India stations have not as yet been provided. This important matter is now the subject of correspondence with the Imperial Government and a conference has been requested.²⁰

Forrest was right. The Commonwealth had hurried into existence an Australian navy. Successive governments had more or less bipartisan support for this—first Deakin, then Fisher and now the Cook government was making provision in Estimates to proceed with that commitment.

Various classes of battleship had been under construction over the previous three years. The battlecruiser *Australia* and the light cruiser HMAS *Sydney* sailed to Australia together, departing Portsmouth on 25 July 1913. They reached the deep-water port at Jervis Bay, south of Sydney, on 2 October, while Forrest was reading his Estimates, and there they met with the cruisers *Encounter* and *Melbourne*, and the river-class torpedo boats *Parramatta*, *Warrego* and *Yarra*. Thus gathered, on Saturday, 4 October 1913, they made their ceremonial entry into Sydney Harbour. Joseph Cook was at his poetic best: ‘A fine day furnished a fine setting for the fulfilment of a fine ideal,’ he said. And the defence minister, Senator Edward Millen, was moved to misquote Kipling: ‘Stern as your fathers were / Stark as your sons shall be.’²¹

The young journalist Keith Murdoch wrote a piece for the journal the *Lone Hand* to coincide with the arrival of Australia’s new navy. ‘Britain’s power in the Pacific has been stripped of its gunfire strength,’ he wrote. The Australian navy was the only alternative for a nation facing racial peril. Of the new fleet and the celebrations upon its arrival, he was eloquent regarding the fundamentals:

Strip it of its bombast. Silence the band. Subdue the millineried speakers and the pomp. And what do you get? The elemental sound, the boom of a gun. And that sound may be the beginning of security for the homes of Australia... Australia’s task in becoming the guardian of white civilisation in the Pacific is fraught with many possibilities.

Murdoch went on to argue that ‘the Englishman has as little appreciation of the Australian’s nationalism as the Australian has of the European’s heritage—the ever-present sense of racial hatred and racial danger.’ On this

point, at least, the radical-nationalist press and the mainstream newspapers were in agreement.²²

The First Lord of the Admiralty signalled his congratulations to the Australian government. But Churchill had revealed his true self when he attempted to retain *Australia* in the North Atlantic, yet another sign of his contempt for Dominion fleets.

Churchill's characteristic bluntness only confirmed Australian fears. In his speech for the Admiralty's Estimates on 17 March 1914, he spelled out what his predecessors had been careful to conceal. He questioned the wisdom of Dominion navies. He argued that the Anglo-Japanese alliance was held together by 'strong continuing bonds of interest': it kept Japan safe from attack by sea; Japan had as much to gain from it as Britain; and the British fleet's concentration in the North Sea had not jeopardised the security of Australia or New Zealand. If the power of Great Britain was shattered at sea, 'the only course of the five million white men in the Pacific would be to seek the protection of the United States.'

Much of Churchill's speech was concerned with British naval matters but his attention to the Pacific and to Australia's strategic viewpoint was unprecedented, and on that he was scathing:

The Dominions want to have their own ships, under their own control, cruising in their own waters and based in their own ports. They want to have something they can see and touch, and take pride in, with feelings of ownership and control. These feelings, although unrecognized by military truth, are natural. They are real facts which will govern events.²³

Churchill declared his indifference to these 'feelings'. He said he would do his duty; he would 'uphold and proclaim the broad principle of unity in command, unity in strategic conception, and of concentration in the decisive theatre and for decisive events'. In other words, he had no time for local superiority in the far-flung reaches of the empire when the survival of the centre was at stake.

The Hurt and the Anger

In the far-flung south, there was outrage among press and informed public opinion alike. There was loud applause for the New Zealand prime minister, Bill Massey, who said: 'I do not want to do Mr Churchill an injustice, but if he means that the people of Australia and New Zealand are to be satisfied

with the protection afforded by Japanese ships and Japanese sailors, then Mr Churchill is very much mistaken.’²⁴ Massey said he did not believe for one moment that the Anglo–Japanese alliance secured the safety of Australasia—the Dominions must look to their own defence.

The illustrated magazine Melbourne *Punch* fumed at Churchill’s indifference to Australian racial concerns. He had shown how little he understood ‘Australia’s attitude towards our discoloured neighbours’ in Asia:

The First Lord would probably be amazed if he heard that Australians were insulted at the idea of their depending on Japan, or any other yellow, brown, pink, black or blue race, for any measure of protection whatever...we only have to look over our back fence to see it grinning at us.

Punch thought ‘John Bull’ too remote from East Asia and the Pacific to have any conception of how troubling this arrangement with the premier Pacific naval power could be. To the British, it seemed, according to Mr Punch,

The Japanese menace is as absurd as if someone cried out against the possibility of a fly-speck falling on an elephant and breaking its neck. To offer us Japanese protection is very like telling Mary’s little lamb—Have no fear, small and tender sheep, you are excellently provided for. We have set the wolf to watch over you.²⁵

Australia’s official response was less colourful but no less forceful, and the anger was bipartisan. Cook spoke publicly at an Australian Natives Association conference and banquet in Wangaratta, in northern Victoria. Australia was told by imperial statesmen, he said,

that the Pacific was being made safe and secure, not by the might and majesty of the British fleet, but by the Japanese treaty. He hoped that Australia would always be friendly with Japan and that the treaty would continue in its present form. But when he was asked to rely on the Japanese treaty alone for the peace of the Pacific, a very serious situation was created. They were under treaty obligations with a nation whose people they might not admit to their shores. They had their white Australia policy and they must at all costs defend it.²⁶

Senator Millen told an *Age* reporter that ‘the pages of history are strewn with the wreckage of fruitless alliances.’ He said Australia would not be deflected from her course by the pronouncement of the First Lord of the Admiralty, as his interpretation of the alliance was not accepted in Australia.

Millen charged Churchill with a breach of faith. He was summoning the spirit of James Service and Deakin, Pearce and Hughes, and others who,

over the years, had been rebuffed or sidelined by British imperial arrangements, going back to the 1880s:

Mr Churchill's statement involves the definite non-fulfilment by the Admiralty of obligations undertaken by the 1909 Agreement. It involves the destruction of the basis on which the Royal Australian Navy was organised, and as a result of which the Australian people committed themselves to the expenditure of several millions of public money...Mr Churchill's statement means the abandonment of those features of the Royal Australian Navy which, in 1909, were regarded by the Admiralty as most essential, especially his expression of opinion that battle cruisers are not needed in the Pacific and should be sent to Home waters.

An agreed co-operative policy had been abandoned without consultation and replaced, according to Millen, by no policy at all, by 'an uncoordinated, ephemeral scheme possessing neither permanence, nor clear aim and function'.²⁷

Fisher was delighted with the government's firm stance. Pearce, too, was blunt in his condemnation of the British position. In a letter to the retiring governor-general he set out the problem:

We insist that there ought to be a British Fleet for the Pacific; without it British diplomacy is nullified in one of the great oceans of the world and we are compelled to allow our policy to be dictated by an ally...A British-Japanese alliance is better for Australia than a German-Japanese alliance would be. But the alliance is temporary, it suits both Japan and us at present, it may suit neither in a few years.²⁸

The backbenchers who joined in the chorus were intent upon much the same message, rejecting Churchill's strategic doctrine and his faith in the alliance with Japan. On the eve of war Australia was alone in the Pacific, the lamb watched over by the wolf, or so it seemed to the political leaders who had no faith in British arrangements for the security of white Australia.

That contrary member for Parkes, Bruce Smith, defended the Admiralty's turnabout. He told the parliament that it was 'quite feasible, quite allowable and quite forgivable that the Imperial Government may have entered into a certain arrangement at the Conferences in 1909 and 1911, and found it necessary at a later date to change their tactics'.²⁹ He was entirely out of step with the mood. Both sides rallied to condemn him.

The Glaswegian Labor man Edward Riley called Smith 'an imperialist of the truest blue'. Riley had a strong anti-militarist predisposition. He was deeply suspicious of 'the people who raise war scares' and who were forever plumping for more weaponry and armaments, but he was firmly behind the defence minister:

When we, as a Commonwealth, entered into an agreement to have an Australian Navy, we were told that we should have an Australian Navy in Australian waters, manned by Australians, and built with Australian money. We have kept our part of the compact, and have almost completed our Fleet Unit, according to the agreement...After we have done all this, we find that the First Lord of the Admiralty in the Old Country says that large ships of the *Australia* class are useless lying in the Pacific, and suggests that they should be sent to the North Sea, where they are more urgently required. While I believe in the Old Country and the Old Flag, I am an Australian so far as the Australian Fleet is concerned, and I say that Senator Millen took the right stand when he said that the Fleet should remain in Australian waters, as it was intended that it should do.³⁰

On the other side of the parliament, the ‘blue blood’ Tory, Boer War veteran and heavyweight boxer Colonel Granville Ryrie was also keen to endorse Senator Millen. He called the Millen response ‘masterly’. He was formerly a Royal Navy subsidy man but he had swung behind the vision of an Australian navy once the Imperial Conference of 1909 had appeared to endorse it. He thought things even better when, in 1911, it appeared that London had agreed to consult the Dominions on matters of imperial policy. But Churchill had dashed those hopes:

We are entitled to be consulted regarding the absolute change in the whole Naval policy of Australia which has been forecasted by Mr. Winston Churchill, but the inference is that we are not to take any part in the Imperial deliberations. We expect that we shall be consulted. We were consulted at the Imperial Conference in 1909, and again at that held in 1911; but now, without any warning, we are told not directly, but indirectly, that our Naval policy is based on wrong lines. We are told that battle cruisers are not required in the Pacific; that the Japanese Alliance is a sufficient protection for Australia. There is no time-limit to the statement, and I presume the contention is that the alliance is a sufficient protection for all time. The people of Australia, however, do not so regard it.³¹

And yet, if the alliance had been between two white-ruled nations—an Anglo–American alliance, for instance, in which the Americans were charged in the absence of Britain with the defence of the Pacific, in which the American navy reigned supreme—then the anxieties of Australian men of affairs would have been of another order altogether. There may have been no anxieties at all, save the sentimental pangs associated with the passing of the baton from old blood ties to new: same blood! There may even have been unalloyed joy—such an alliance being the mark of the white race marching forward in unison, confounding the territorial ambitions of the Asiatics and the pessimism of the Pearsonians. But the shocking implication of Churchill’s speech was that Australian security was now in the hands of the Japanese navy and Japan, the First Lord insisted, could be trusted. Australia’s leaders did not—could not—agree.

In April 1914, General Sir Ian Hamilton, the British inspector-general of overseas forces, was touring Australia and reporting on the state of Australia's military preparation. He wrote to Herbert Asquith, the British prime minister, about the difficulties he had encountered, noting the strength of popular sentiment against military preparations for overseas service:

The whole vital force of the country, i.e. the rank and file of its people, are standing firm together against any such proposition. Play the tune of an Australian Army for Australia and they dance to any extent. Not otherwise. Australia—not Empire—is then the string we must harp on. That is to say, we must encourage them to do what they will do willingly and lavishly, namely pay up for safeguarding a white Australia against the cursed Jap. Then, when the time comes, and when we are fighting for our lives in India or elsewhere, I for one am confident that the whole military force of Australia will be freely at our disposal.³²

A month later Hamilton was in Auckland rallying the New Zealanders with talk of a coming race war in the Pacific that would decide 'whether Asiatics or Europeans were going to guide the destinies of this planet'.³³ Within a year he was commanding the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force in charge of the Gallipoli campaign, with the Australians and New Zealanders 'at his disposal'.

War and Peace

‘It is a racial war, and has its well-springs in the fundamentals of human interests and human nature.’

Billy Hughes, *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, 14 October 1914

‘My own [opinion] is and always has been in favour of sending every man we could rake up.’

Billy Hughes, cable to Andrew Fisher, 16 January 1915

At the beginning of the Great War, the Japanese government honoured the Anglo–Japanese alliance by entering the conflict as Britain’s ally. The ambition on each side was by no means identical. The British hoped Japanese action would not extend to the Pacific Ocean but might be confined to German holdings on the continent of East Asia and to naval action in the China Seas. And, like the Australian government, London was anxious, at least initially, to have Japan’s territorial ambitions limited to the Asian mainland. Japan, on the other hand, was inclined to act wherever it might be advantageous, including in the Pacific, and was soon to realise that Britain’s urgent needs would gift it a free hand north of the equator.

The sixth federal Australian election was held just weeks after the declaration of war, and while the new Labor ministry was settling into office—Andrew Fisher was prime minister for a third time—events in Europe were fixing into a terrible shape that would snuff out the lives of millions and ruin the lives of many more.

In the Pacific, less-publicised events were shaping in the form of menace for the new Australian government. The British were so fully engaged in European waters and the Indian Ocean that they could spare no ships or troops for skirmishes on the far fringes of empire. Consequently, the original plan for Japanese confinement in Asian waters was discarded. From late 1914 onwards, it was clear that greater Japanese assistance would be required and that dependence would come at a price. 'It has even been contemplated (and still is),' wrote the secretary of state, Viscount Harcourt, in December 1914, 'that the Japanese fleet may in future be employed in the European theatre of war.' But for the time being, Britain needed help in the Pacific. The Japanese navy was called in to assist with the hunt for German raiders and to occupy German possessions north of the equator (the Marshall Islands and the Carolines), while Australian forces took Rabaul on New Britain and then German New Guinea.

At first the Japanese position was deferential, all indications suggesting they would occupy the northern islands temporarily, but that position soon hardened into a claim. On 7 November, the last German stronghold in China surrendered to Japan. In the Pacific, much that was formerly German was now in Japanese hands and the government in Tokyo was well aware the British needed Japan desperately. The extortive pattern of great-power relations was following its routine course.

British hopes for the Pacific adjusted accordingly. The Japanese right of possession was quietly acknowledged, while the Australian government was assured that all territorial questions would be settled at the end of the war. Harcourt sent a dispatch to the new governor-general in Melbourne, Sir Ronald Munro Ferguson, for 'your eye only and in no circumstances to be seen by anyone else':

It would be impossible at this moment to risk a quarrel with our ally [Japan] which would be the certain and immediate result of any attempt diplomatically to oust them now from those Islands which they are occupying more or less at the invitation of the Admiralty...The moral of it is that you ought in the most gradual and diplomatic way to begin to prepare the mind of your Ministers for the possibility that at the end of the war Japan may be left in possession of the Northern Islands and we with everything south of the Equator. I know that they won't like this, but after all the thing of most importance are those territories most contiguous to Australia, and it will be a great gain to add German New Guinea to Papua and to have the whole of the Solomon Island group under the British flag.¹

'No Parallel in Our History'

By January 1915, there was deadlock in Europe, the first Australian Imperial Force (AIF) was training in Egypt and the Japanese were in control in the Pacific, intent upon exploiting the opportunities afforded by the European war.

In Melbourne, the governor-general was trying to prepare the minds of Australia's ministers, but the ministers were, as yet, unable to accept the hard facts. Ferguson was fed up with their unhelpful attachment to the vision of a British Pacific. He thought the White Australia policy, together with a small population, was a problem that Australian leadership had failed to address with appropriate immigration policies: 'It leaves us [with] an empty continent,' he wrote, 'while it invites occupation by other peoples. This fool's paradise needs a rude awakening, and if a Japanese naval base near the Line [the Equator] should act as a solvent then it would be a blessing in disguise.'²

But the Fisher government was not inclined to relent. The diplomatic traffic from London, along with a regular supply of translated extracts from the Japanese press, convinced Fisher and his cabinet that Japan was committed to further expansion in the Pacific. It was also becoming clear that the new status quo was quite possibly irreversible.

The British tried to soften the blow—top-secret cables advised the government in Melbourne that the Japanese did intend to annex the islands but that all seized German possessions in the Pacific would be 'open for discussion' at the end of the war. The telegrams included stern advice from the secretary of state to the effect that 'no anti-Japanese agitation should, during the progress of the war, be allowed to arise in Australia.' British dependence on the Japanese was now a strategic necessity and the Fisher government was made well aware of Japan's new-found leverage in London, and of its new-found assertiveness.

Early in 1915, the Japanese ambassador in London sought to have Australia join the Anglo-Japanese commercial treaty of 1911, which contained provision for most-favoured-nation tariff treatment as well as reciprocal rights of entry and residence. The ambassador declared 'unequivocally' that the entry and residence clause would not be used but its presence would symbolically exempt his people from the great offence of the White Australia policy, setting them apart from Chinese and Indians. In addition, the trade advantages to each nation might be considerable.

The racial dimension of the Japanese desire for the entry and residency clause, if only on paper, is mentioned in passing by Hughes's biographer Laurie Fitzhardinge. Writing in the early 1970s, he calls it 'the importance of "face"' to the Japanese. But there was more to it than that: the Japanese wanted racial equality with the West and the global authority that Western colonialism so freely exercised over 'inferior' races—thus, their repeated plea not to be lumped in with Chinese and Indians.³

In Melbourne, the Japanese consul, Mr Shimuzu, also pursued the government's signature but to no avail. Fisher, strongly supported by Hughes and Pearce, did not believe the residency clause would be left dormant. They saw trade concessions as a Trojan Horse for immigration and, ultimately, the end of white Australia. The Japanese had initially pledged to hold the islands north of the Equator in trust for settlement at some later date, and what had happened? They had exploited their advantage and seized them. All the more likely, therefore, that the 'unequivocal' commitment of a Japanese diplomat was pure deception. The Australians, fearful, were digging in. In Fisher's words, Japan's new assertiveness was creating a situation with 'no parallel in our history'.⁴

In mid-June, at Gallipoli, the summer heat had arrived, with the flies. Men went about half-naked, swam when they could, and otherwise suffered in great numbers from dysentery, diarrhoea and paratyphoid, and from the stench and infection of thousands of untended corpses. The men who had, according to Masfield, 'walked and looked like kings in old poems' now went about 'thin, haggard, as weak as kittens, and covered in suppurating sores', according to a medical officer on the peninsula.

Meanwhile, in Perth and then Melbourne, a Japanese naval squadron paid a goodwill visit. There were speeches aplenty. Admiral Chisaka told dignitaries gathered on his flagship that he believed 'the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, which was brought about in the interest of humanity and justice, would last until eternity.' And in Melbourne, where forty of the Japanese officers were accorded a civic welcome at the town hall, Andrew Fisher was also looking to the future, his optimism similarly political:

In welcoming the visitors, [he] said that Admiral Chisaka represented a race that had won the respect of the world by the courage and valour it had shown on sea and land and by the honourable way in which it had kept its word (Cheers). It was impossible not to admire such a race. Australia and Japan were but a little distance apart, and he hoped the peace and amity that existed between them...would last forever.⁵

Fisher was walking a tightrope between his true thoughts and his commitment to the British cause. He and his ministers were not assuaged by Japanese gestures of goodwill. They were deeply disturbed by Japan's expansionist activities in the Pacific—the strategic opportunism; by the diplomatic pressure for trade concessions; by British acquiescence; by the recurring worry that Japan might switch sides; and by the weight of that nation's leverage in London as, more and more, Britain was beholden. Government and the Opposition were entirely committed, by bonds of blood and culture, to Britain's fight against Germany, understanding the dire implications for Australia should the war be lost. But they were also frustrated, hugely so, by Japan's rise to power under the aegis of Britain, and by what appeared to be no real understanding—still—in London of Australia's peril. For Britain, the enemy was Germany. For Australia it was Germany and, inevitably, Japan.⁶

The one politician who, more than any other, was convinced that Australia would one day have to fight Japan, was Billy Hughes. In October of 1915, Fisher resigned, exhausted, and Labor's parliamentarians elected Hughes their leader and thus leader of the nation.

Almost immediately Hughes decided he must go to England to consult on the conduct of the war, what further part Australia might play and the shaping of the peace. His nation had not been consulted on the strategy behind Gallipoli, where the Anzacs had won glory for themselves but paid a terrible cost for no tangible gain. The decision to evacuate the peninsula had also been made without consultation. After a decade of importuning, Australia was still not accepted in the inner counsels of imperial policy.⁷

There were urgent problems in shipping, too, and the sale of Australia's exports, but top of Hughes's agenda was the problem of Japan and the Pacific. Behind his opposition to the Japanese hold on the northern islands was his dread of Japan's future aims—a demand for oil or territorial concessions in the Dutch East Indies, for instance—and his conviction that population pressure in Japan would inevitably turn that nation to the empty spaces of Australia. His firm belief that Australia's immigration restrictions were imperilled had churned within him for years. It was churning still.⁸

Mr Shimuzu renewed his campaign when Hughes replaced Fisher and Hughes did not welcome the occasion. He found the Japanese consul to be 'most pertinacious and almost aggressive' in the pursuit of his cause. He fobbed him off; ironically, he referred him to the proper channels through

London. Reflecting on Hughes's account of the meeting, the governor-general wrote home to the new British secretary of state, Andrew Bonar Law:

It is hard to say how far the Japanese may put pressure on us during the war to secure the 'most favoured nation treatment' [in trade] or even for the admission of coloured races to Australia...No doubt anxiety would be felt as to whether the Home Government would support Australia as against Japan's demands and be in a position after the war to resist them effectively. It is this question, as well as the general subject of British Trade Policy which makes Mr. Hughes anxious to get Home.⁹

In England, Hughes had to be most circumspect in public on the subject of Japan, but his inspirational crusade—his 'barnstorming' tour around the country—left no doubt over his racial obsessions and his belief in war as a cleansing fire.

Hughes's speeches made him an overnight sensation. His message was carried on the sheer force of his personality, his violent gestures, pungent language, exotic phrases, passionate sincerity and absolute self-confidence. The German press called him 'the darling of the imperialists and the jingo agitators'. He could rally a crowd like no other orator on the English public stage. His message, it would seem, rang true.

Like Henry Lawson, he believed that better the nation rise in storm than rot in deadly peace.¹⁰ He thought the race had found its soul in the midst of war, confirming the 'ancient valour' of the bloodline. It had saved the empire,

saved us from moral—aye, and physical—degeneration and decay; for I firmly believe that we were [hitherto] slipping down with increasing velocity into the very abyss of degeneration...We were becoming flabby and in danger of losing the ancient qualities that made our race what it is. The war has purged us, and is purging us of dross, and making us turn our eye towards that which must inspire us—a better land...The war is the beacon light that is lighting us on; it is the sign and the symbol of our race...and will be the means of our salvation.¹¹

As for the Dominions: 'They have on the field of battle, proved the ancient valour of our sires still burns in their veins. They have all proved themselves worthy of their breeding,' said Hughes.

In Australia, the Hughes government was already embarked upon the destruction of perhaps the most successful ethnic minority in the land—the German community. The Commonwealth administration had begun a program of internment and commercial ruin, and of community dismemberment in every state, a program that would culminate in mass

deportations at the end of the war and would only be acknowledged with a governor-general's apology in 1999.¹²

In 1916, in England, Hughes boasted about this destruction-in-process in the course of his tour. His ferocity was unbounded:

We in Australia have done something to show our earnestness in tearing out the cancer of German influence...there is only one way in which you can do this thing. Do it with such thoroughness that the German will avoid this country as if it were the very plague itself.

Hughes was unable to impugn the good name of a faithful ally in public, but amid his soapbox and town-hall diatribes on the 'cancerous' Germans he did manage, in his typically vivid idiom, to allude to another unnamed peril itching to get at Australia:

How few are the free peoples of the Dominions and how vast their lands...Think how the palms of nations inflamed with the lust of conquest, desiring room for expansion, for a place in the sun, [think how they] itch to gather those vast, rich and fertile lands within their grip, and then you will better understand what the defence of our Empire means [to us].¹³

Publicly, Hughes was feted and cheered. Publicly, he relished the occasion, the opportunity to talk up the war and rail against Germany. Privately, he was working to save Australia from Japan. He had arrived at a testing time for the alliance. The hammering at Verdun in France and the stalemate in the trenches was the unhappy backdrop to Britain's anxious desire to hold the alliance together. The Japanese kept the Foreign Office well informed of German inducements to withdraw from the conflict or to switch sides. These were considerable—they amounted to a free hand in East Asia and the Pacific. As Edward Grey, the foreign secretary, put it: Britain would have to show 'more understanding of Japan's Asia and Pacific interests'. This did not bode well for Hughes.¹⁴

Britain wanted more assistance from Japan. The Japanese wanted more concessions in various spheres—territory, trade and perhaps immigration—that put the shudders into Hughes. They pressed again, wanting Australia to accede to the Anglo-Japanese commercial treaty, to follow the lead of the Canadians, a gesture of conciliation for a vital ally.¹⁵ In discussions with Grey, Bonar Law and officials at the Foreign Office, Hughes found himself on the defensive, parrying requests for co-operation. Over a month, in meeting after meeting, he was pressed to give ground on immigration restrictions, the commercial treaty and the Pacific Islands north of the

Equator. He gave next to nothing and the ongoing contest affirmed his misgivings.

In a long letter to George Pearce, the acting prime minister while Hughes was away, he outlined his grave forebodings: his worst fears seemed to be materialising. It is a particularly important document, showing Hughes speaking confidentially to his closest associate in mind and spirit—to his racial soulmate, as it were. The letter makes clear how equally profound were Hughes's anxieties for the white Australia he cherished and Grey's concerns for the stability of the alliance with Japan:

As to the Japanese problem; in its threefold aspect (1) abolition or modification of our alien restriction legislation (2) Commercial Treaty (3) control of the Pacific...The question is of course too big to be covered in a letter, but two things should interest you vitally. One: that all our fears—or conjectures—that Japan was and is most keenly interested in Australia are amply borne out by facts. Grey told me that the Japanese Ambassador had been pressing him before my arrival about the Commercial Treaty; though he had not said anything about the modification of the [language] 'test'.

Hughes went on to tell Pearce that he was concerned about the 'large and growing party in Japan who favour Germany' and how this party might grow stronger if Britain faltered, if things got worse on the Western Front. According to Hughes, Grey cited several possibilities, including some relaxation of immigration restrictions in Australia. On that, Hughes would not move:

I told Grey that Australia would fight to the last ditch rather than allow Japanese to enter Australia. Upon that point we were adamant. I told him that as to the control of the Pacific after the war, we were prepared to consider favourably the Equator as a line of demarkation, giving us control of all islands to the South.¹⁶

Hughes was even prepared to consider some modification of the tariff in favour of Japan but nothing could move him on white Australia and he would not tie Australia to any part of the commercial treaty.

Before he departed for home, Hughes allowed Grey to organise a meeting with the Japanese ambassador. Once again, the pressure was on the Australian prime minister and once again Hughes did not budge on the vital issue. He kept faith with the racial foundation of his Commonwealth. For these men, Hughes and Pearce and their ilk, on both sides of the parliament, everything that was good and progressive, all the promise they conjured for the future of the nation, followed from racial purity.

Fitzhardinge sums up Hughes's state of mind at the end of the tour: 'By the time he returned to Australia his latent fear of Japan had become an

urgent apprehension amounting almost to an obsession, the more powerful because it could not be publicly expressed.’¹⁷

‘I Bid You Go’

Hughes had come to believe that a mighty sacrifice for Britain—a kind of moral blackmail written in Australian blood—was perhaps the only way to commit the Mother Country to the defence of white Australia. Conscription had become a racial necessity. ‘I bid you go and fight for White Australia in France,’ he told the able-bodied men of the nation on the eve of the 1916 referendum.

There is little doubt that Hughes’s obsession influenced his bid for conscription—to show that Australia was going to the brink, to the last man and the last shilling. In this sense, Australia’s Great War represented a race war, the massive commitment, the great blood sacrifice, a quid pro quo—to future-proof the racial purity of the nation. Hughes had come to understand that Australia must earn by sacrifice the right to a voice in the making of the peace: a voice that could not be denied, speaking for a nation that could not be forsaken.

His own censorship legislation in the form of the draconian War Precautions Act prevented Hughes from explicit criticism of an ally and yet, repeatedly, he spoke of Australia’s peril, declaring a defeat for the empire could prefigure the undoing of white Australia. On his way home from London he made a typically fervent speech at Adelaide which somehow got past the censors, perhaps because he did not name Japan:

We have lifted up on our topmost minaret the badge of White Australia, but we are, as it were, a drop in a coloured ocean ringed around with a thousand million of the coloured races. How are we to be saved? What arrogance and what futility it would be to emblazon White Australia on our banners if we are not prepared to fight for it, and how are five to fight a thousand, valiant though they may be?

That fight was only possible with the support of the British empire, but Hughes ventured to imagine a day when his nation’s population would be much enhanced and better able to look after itself, and the population, he insisted, must be white to prosper and be free: ‘If we are to hold our own,’ he told the gathered crowd, Australia ‘must be peopled by men of our own race and ideas’.¹⁸

The day after he announced the decision to hold a conscription referendum, Hughes addressed a closed session of members of both Houses of Parliament. No record was made but the proceedings were reported, years later, by E. L. Piesse, who was director of military intelligence at the time. Piesse was not present but he was well placed to know, as were the anti-conscription Labor men in the parliament who refused to be gagged and talked publicly about the meeting:

The proceedings were not published but it was currently reported and widely believed that an authoritative statement had been made to the meeting [by Hughes] that Japan would challenge the White Australia policy after the war, that Australia would then need the help of the rest of the Empire, and that if she wished to be sure of getting it then she must now throw her full strength into the war in Europe.¹⁹

Conscription was a warming topic in Australia well before Hughes returned home, not least because Britain had introduced it—first for single men in January and then for all men (aged eighteen to forty-one) in May 1916. Voices for and against were shaping for a fight. A mighty battle of ideas was underway. The cause sparked the most passionate and bitter political contest in Australia's history.²⁰ Conscription raised issues of civil liberty and the morality of compelling men to kill. It violated the cherished tradition of volunteers fighting for empire. It stoked tensions between labour and capital, and it stirred deep divisions of religion and race for those Irish Catholics who saw the British army as a brutal oppressor in their homeland. Yes campaigners appealed to King and Country, to destiny, democracy and decency. Protestants said God was pro-conscription as sure as he was in Heaven. They conjured images of a Teutonic dark age, should the war be lost; they pondered the economic, strategic and cultural frameworks that would surely be undone; they worried the nation would be rendered a put-upon backwater.

The No or Antis organisation was based overwhelmingly in the labour movement, with a strong Catholic representation led by Archbishop Mannix, perhaps the only man in the country who could match Hughes for unflappable resolve and inflammatory language. No campaigners saw the war progressing with no equality of sacrifice, just profiteers making a bundle while poverty spread among working people, with industry and agriculture blighted for lack of hands to do the work. They spoke of 'the treachery of the one-time umbrella mender', and they assumed, wrongly, that Hughes had been dachshund while in London and was doing the

bidding of 'British plutocrats and peers'.²¹ They agreed with the Yes campaigners on just one count: everything that mattered was at stake.

As the campaign progressed, the issue of Japan entered into the controversy with little in the way of concern for the feelings of an ally or the directions of the censors. It was impossible to keep Japan out of the conversation.

The opponents of conscription in the parliament were more outspoken than the advocates, but on both sides the spectre of Japan was employed to support the case. Hughes argued for the maximum possible commitment. He argued for a quick, decisive victory in Europe, for Lloyd George's avowed 'knockout blow'—the best way to secure Australia for the British race.

In the parliament, some members expressed their reluctance to speak plainly. They declared themselves unable to tell the public all they knew, restrained as they were by censorship. They spoke of Japan in thinly veiled terms: 'the foe' and 'an Eastern race'. Some spoke in alarmist generalities without actually naming this 'foe'.

Formerly a Deakin man, the Victorian independent George Wise argued for conscription on the grounds that a swift victory was essential lest this terrible war of attrition consume the white races, a Pearsonian vision:

Are we going to win quickly or are we going to spin this war out until we, like every other white race, are absolutely exhausted? Every man with any capacity for thinking at all must have realized that sooner or later the great Armageddon must come—when the white and the coloured races of this world meet in conflict. At present the white races are engaged in destroying their manpower, leaving the coloured races untouched. This makes it all the more necessary that the war should be brought to an end as quickly as possible in order that our nation, at any rate, may not be absolutely exhausted when peace comes about.²²

Wise was incorrect to suggest the war was fratricide only for whites. Millions of 'coloured' soldiers and labourers were mobilised and deployed in one way or another, by both sides, and like the 'white races' they paid a terrible price.²³

Opponents of conscription also conjured a war in which the white races were destroying themselves, and they played on race possibly to greater effect. William Maloney appeared to be close to panic and, in his own way, as catastrophist as George Wise. He quoted from his 1905 booklet 'Flashlights on Japan and the East'. Back then he had urged the government to arm every man forthwith; to deploy 'terrible scientific devices in every

port', to establish armouries and arsenals to ready Australia against the menace of the East:

I said that if the East fights the West, the West must combine...I say again, tonight, that it would be better for us to go to America cap-in-hand, than, perhaps, to bend some day in sackcloth and ashes under the yoke of an Eastern race. Therefore, whilst I hope that Prussia will be destroyed, I desire to retain every man in Australia.²⁴

In the Upper House, Senator John Mullan was also in favour of keeping the men at home: 'If the people of Australia today really knew the dangers to which they are exposed, they would lynch every legislator who advocates the policy of further denuding this country of its manhood,' he said. He quoted Hughes to his own advantage: 'we are but a drop in a coloured ocean.' And he spoke of Japan without naming it:

I cannot say all I would like on this matter, but perhaps the hour of trial will come to Australia, when perhaps it is too late, and then an infuriated and betrayed Australia will be looking for the men who were responsible for this policy of sending away our manhood.²⁵

Women's organisations on both sides of the conscription divide also worried about the depletion of the manhood, the racial cost of losing the best blood. The eugenicist and sex educator Marion Piddington published a booklet in 1916 which advocated a scheme to allow women of good stock who were left widows by the war to have children through artificial insemination. Piddington was advocating, she wrote, 'for the amelioration of individual and national destiny after the war such as will accord with the principles of modern eugenics'.²⁶

The Adelaide-based School for Mothers Institute also published a booklet in 1916, the text keeping as best it could to a neutral stance on conscription, with the emphasis clearly on the racial cost of the war:

The war is depleting our country of her finest and most vigorous manhood. This will weaken her not only in the present, but in future generations. The soundest and healthiest men are needed for the battlefield while the less fit are spared to be fathers of the coming race.²⁷

The poster 'Vote No and Keep Australia White' appeared to be everywhere, according to Hughes's private secretary, Percy Deane. Some No advocates were gripped by catastrophic visions similar to Dr Maloney's and campaigned accordingly. J. H. Catts was a Labor anti-conscriptionist who was both director of recruiting for New South Wales and a member of the Federal Parliamentary War Committee. He spoke defiantly in the parliament

about the Japanese danger. He listed the terms Japan would demand at the making of the peace, including ‘the removal of race prejudice in Australia’ and everything that would mean. He said Britain would desert them. He commended a passage from the *Pastoralists Review* of February 1916:

After the peace is declared the colour line will become more and more indefinable, and we shall be compelled to recognise the fact, for Britain will say to us, ‘Renounce your “White Australia” policy or suffer the consequences. Your blood will be on your own head.’

Catts also touched on a vital point. He said the referendum would not have ‘a ghost of a chance’ if the people of Australia were alerted to the dangers which threatened them in the Pacific. This reminds us that outcomes are forever contingent—that the Yes vote would surely have prevailed if the voters had been asked for conscription to defend Australia against Japan.

Outside the parliament, the message was the same. Catts defied the censors. He actively campaigned in town and country in defiance of the War Precautions Act. ‘Conscription for Australia means race suicide,’ he declared in the first referendum campaign.²⁸

The race question was also a class question. For some of the Labor Antis, conscription served only the capitalists and the Japanese, and coloured labour was merely another way for a tyrannous government to subjugate the workers. As Ross McKibbin notes: ‘Both sides, particularly the antis, who adopted a very strict definition of whiteness...were shameless in their racism. For the antis, conscription would destroy White Australia by killing off white Australians, who would be replaced by a low-paid mongrel race favoured only by the capitalist.’²⁹

At the highest levels the Yes campaigners worried about the way the Antis were playing the race card. When a shipload of Maltese migrants arrived in Sydney late in 1916, it was said these foreign workers were proof that cheap labour would be introduced to replace conscripted men.

Hughes was sufficiently worried by the propaganda value of such arrivals that his government decided a second shipload of 214 Maltese men would not be allowed to land—they were ruled ineligible because they could not speak Dutch—and instead would be sent on to New Caledonia. The prime minister was on the defensive. He declared that ‘during the War, no coloured labour would be admitted to Australia’, his strict definition of ‘coloured’ including the Maltese.³⁰

The Antis seized on the preposition, on that insidious word ‘during’. What of thereafter, asked the journal of the Australian Workers’ Union: ‘What does Mr. Hughes think 300,000 volunteers left Australia so willingly for? To come back after the war and find that it has been necessary to throw aside one of the nation’s ideals in White Australia?’³¹

At a monster rally at the Sydney town hall, Hughes delivered a typically ferocious case for Yes, an outpouring of argument and invective directed at his opponents:

It is not conscience that holds them back; it is not a manifestation of love for a White Australia; but it is an outward and visible sign of the white feather. (Prolonged applause.) When they speak of the yellow peril they would do well to speak also of the yellow streak.

Shifting tone, he appealed to ‘the young men still left in this country’ to rise up to the spirit that sustained their fellow countrymen in the trenches:

The spirit of Australia, the spirit of our race, the spirit that has made free men, that has carved out the Empire and that alone can hold this country a White Australia and a free government. (Loud Cheers)...If Britain wins and we stand with her, the White Australia policy is forever safe. (Applause.)

Hughes said, ‘every institution we cherish, White Australia, the power of the people, all these things are in deadly peril,’ and he implored the eligible men to fight for these cherished things, and to ‘fight for White Australia in France’.³²

Hughes Unbowed

The No vote won the referendum by the narrowest of margins. The governor-general was horrified: ‘One can only hope that things are so black that the better elements of society will be drawn together in a fight against the Powers of Darkness,’ he wrote.³³

Hughes was full of anguish. ‘We have lost by a head,’ he told Keith Murdoch. ‘Ah! That head. How very little yet how much.’ He was particularly angry at the soldiers who voted No. About forty-five per cent of the AIF had rejected conscription and the heaviest No vote came from men at the front.

He was furious, too, at the lies told by his opponents, particularly the claim that cheap Asian labour would be imported by rapacious capitalists to replace the men who were conscripted and shipped to the front:

Never was there such a swarm of lies let loose upon the earth since the Father of Lies began his life's work...They [the people] lapped them up as a cat laps the cream. Perhaps the chief lie, or chain of lies—for there were thousands of versions of it—referred to 'Coloured labour'.³⁴

But straight away, Hughes was ready to fight again. He was not inclined to fade, or to resign as he said he would. 'I am very fit,' he told Keith Murdoch, 'Mirabile dictu! I've done enough to kill three men these last twelve months yet I'm better than when I started.'³⁵

After a stormy meeting with the Labor caucus, Hughes led twenty-five MPs out of the party to form the National (or 'win the war') Party and rule with the support of the Opposition. The Labor Senate forced him to the polls, he won a sweeping victory in both Houses and—six months after the election—he determined upon a second referendum. He loosed another campaign in which each side argued with equal facility that a vote for their cause would best serve the defence of Australia against its enemies, whatever colour they might be; and yet again, Japan figured in the furious exchange.

The second campaign was even more venomous than the first, and equally ruthless: Deakin's failing mind was beyond political intervention of any kind, yet a close associate engineered a fervent endorsement of conscription in the former prime minister's name. It was published in the *Argus*:

Fellow countrymen—I have lived and worked to help you keep Australia white and free...God in his wisdom has decreed that at this great crisis in our history my tongue must be silent owing to my failing powers. He alone knows how I yearn, my fellow Australians, to help you to say that magic word which shall aid our gallant soldiers and save our civilisation.³⁶

Loyalists also composed 'The Anti's Creed', which read in part:

I believe that men at the front should be sacrificed...
I believe that treachery is a virtue...
That disloyalty is true citizenship...
That desertion is ennobling...
I believe I'm worm enough to vote NO.

No supporters were similarly outrageous at times. One of their pamphlets claimed that conscription would steal away what was left of Australian manhood and compel the women to marry Chinese, 'Japs' and 'Hindoos'. 'She herself,' as one Anti put it, 'did not want to be the grandmother of any piebald Australians.'³⁷ Once again there was talk of 'mongrel offspring'.

The Victorian Labor Party newspaper, *Labor Call*, campaigned feverishly throughout the two conscription battles. It summoned the sorry spectacle of the ‘great white races’ battering each other to pieces, ‘virtually committing suicide’ by sending men abroad, when the ‘remaining manhood’ should be retained in Australia for the great racial struggle to come. On 6 April 1917, *Labor Call* ran a piece headed ‘Back to Barbarism’ that was accompanied by a cartoon of a Buddha and a Japanese soldier, monkey-like, with drawn sword beside a Japanese flag:

While the Whites are butchering each other, Asia is waiting and grinning. Behind the fatalistic Buddha stands a new nation with knowledge of War and Cunning, to lead the Asiatic hundreds of millions...None of the Allies can reproach Germany for her alliance with bloodthirsty, barbarous Asiatics. Germany did not begin the thing. The other warring nations brought their savages, Africans of the lower type, Mohammedans of a better type and hordes from Asia to help kill the Europeans. The immediate result of this war...will be a vast Asiatic conquest, a period of darkness and misery over Europe.³⁸

What then?

The fears that fired up *Labor Call* were also firing up James Catts, in the course of the second referendum. He was prosecuted seven times for ‘statements likely to prejudice His Majesty’s relations with foreign powers’. He said he was merely speaking the truth about the war aims and the extortive objectives of Japan. He insisted that the Japanese were playing the long game. That Hughes thought much the same of Japan did not diminish Catts’ offence. The censors went after him, but they could not keep up with him as he travelled about, and provincial and city papers alike covered his alarmist message.³⁹

Archbishop Mannix, too, had a racial point of view quite apart from his Celtic resentment of British tyranny at home in Ireland. By the time the second referendum came around he was fast becoming a household name across the nation, despised or idolised accordingly. In the 1916 referendum he had spoken of ‘a certain Oriental Power that we one day must surely fight’. In 1917 he declared, yet again, that the first duty of Australians was to Australia, not to Britain. Mannix spoke of the Asian danger to white Australia, of the unbending embargo against even ‘our coloured fellow citizens of the Empire’, and he alluded to the military threat of Japan, a powerful argument for a vote against conscription: ‘There are enemies nearer to Australia than Germany, and the day may not be too far distant when Australians will be required to defend their own interests at home.’⁴⁰

The great anti-conscription procession that wound its way through the streets of Sydney on 16 December 1917 was in tune with Mannix's race-fear theme. A motorcar led the way, featuring a large banner that bore a map of Australia emblazoned with the slogan: 'VOTE NO: KEEP AUSTRALIA WHITE.'⁴¹

In Melbourne, the Women's Peace Army was marching too, led by Adela Pankhurst. They held street demonstrations to protest the price of bread and other basics, to speak of lost manhood and the threat of coloured labour, and to demand a negotiated peace. There were riots and arrests, and Pankhurst was briefly jailed. Hughes was furious. He was deeply suspicious of the treachery he saw in female fickleness and sentimentality. He wrote to Keith Murdoch about 'that woman': 'Adela Pankhurst is making herself a d____d nuisance and I really don't know what to do with the little devil. I hate punishing women but fear I shall have to deport her.'⁴²

When the votes were counted the No case had prevailed, again. The second poll had come in the wake of a terrible year on the Western Front and on the home front, where industrial conflict, repression, civil disorder and riot were signs of a new malaise.

This time the No vote had increased considerably among civilians and soldiers abroad. In Keith Murdoch's opinion, the soldiers, many of them, had been away from home for a long time. He presumed his own race fears were theirs. They were 'striving against an enemy who is not to them nearly as great an object of enmity and dread as the Japanese', he wrote.⁴³

In a long letter to Murdoch, Hughes could not contain his feelings. He wrote of 'the anguish and anger seething within me'. He blamed Sinn Fein, the Industrial Workers of the World, selfishness, war-weariness, the sentimental vote of Australian women. 'And upon my head these rotters have visited the consequences of Australia's failure to do her duty,' he wrote.⁴⁴

He had been persuaded of the urgent military need for conscription but, it must be remembered, there was a political need that was equally compelling, a symbolic dimension: in Hughes's mind, conscription was not merely about flagging recruitment and the numbers at the front. It was the promise of total support—'every man we could rake up'—from which he hoped to secure Britain's unequivocal support, in return, for white Australia. It was the quid pro quo to ensure Australia would not be forsaken come the peace.⁴⁵

Fear of Japan and fear for white Australia were not the principal issues at stake in the conscription campaigns. Yet it is noteworthy, as Humphrey McQueen wrote in 1984, ‘that it should take more than fifty years for one of the primary factors in this continuously discussed episode to penetrate the consciousness of professional historians’. And still, a hundred years after the conscription battle, the race-fear theme is banished from popular memory—indifferent to the accumulated scholarship, drowned out by the patriotic chorus, hidden behind fluttering flags.⁴⁶

The Hub of Empire

On 26 April 1918, Hughes departed for England, again, to attend a series of Imperial War Cabinet meetings at a time when, as he put it, ‘the fate of Civilisation hangs by a hair.’ The British cabinet met almost every day in June and July, and some days in August until, mid-month, the other Dominion prime ministers shipped home. Hughes stayed on.⁴⁷

Cabinet meetings, conferences and speaking tours were but a fraction of his burden. There were vital matters to attend to—the rivalries surrounding the field command of the AIF (Hughes backed General John Monash); home leave for the veteran Anzacs he near-worshipped; trade deals, tariff-preference matters, shipping for Australian wheat and wool, the ever-urgent question of metals; and, of course, the commercial, territorial and treaty ambitions of Japan.⁴⁸

The war was turning; at last, an end was in sight. On 4 October 1918, the German and Austrian governments sued for peace. Hughes was where he needed to be—at the hub of empire, at the negotiating table, to ensure Australian interests did not suffer. He cabled home to the acting prime minister, William Watt: ‘I am trying to do what I can to hold up Australia’s end here and to prevent any peace that does not guarantee peace of the world and safeguard our interests in the Pacific and elsewhere.’⁴⁹

A week later, the *Times* of London published extracts from an article written by a former Japanese prime minister asserting that Japan would not give up the ex-German possessions in China and the Pacific it had seized earlier in the war. The coverage stirred Hughes to a new bout of abandonment anxiety. He had earlier told the British foreign secretary, A. J. Balfour: ‘The Japanese are everywhere and working assiduously. We too

must work in like fashion or retire like my [Welsh] ancestors from the fat plains to the lean and rugged hills.’ Now he wrote to Lloyd George, a letter marked ‘Most Secret’. He was compelled, he said, to restate ‘Australia’s deeply rooted mistrust of Japan’. He argued that the Japanese occupation of those islands was purely provisional; a final settlement awaited a collective solution, surely? He then embarked on a six-hundred-word exposition of the strategic utility of the islands should they fall into enemy hands and, otherwise, how advantageous they might be in British hands.

Lloyd George was firm in his reply. The deal was done. Britain had reiterated its secret commitment in 1917. For Hughes, the exchange confirmed his belief that Japanese suasion in London was a threat to white Australia.⁵⁰

Hughes said, ‘I am trying to do what I can,’ but it seems his unbending, obsessive and often cantankerous performances were not welcome at the inner counsels at this momentous time. Lloyd George allowed Hughes to depart on a speaking tour of Northern England and in his absence proceeded with a series of British cabinet meetings, then went to Paris for a Supreme War Council meeting where the terms of the Armistice were agreed—the settlement to be based on President Woodrow Wilson’s ‘Fourteen Points’, which Hughes regarded as woolly idealism.

Hughes was shocked, upon his return from the North, to find a fait accompli. He was furious that he had not been consulted and that Australia’s interests had been compromised by the acceptance of the Fourteen Points, which contained, in his view, dangerously permissive clauses asserting an equality of trade conditions and the ‘impartial adjustment of all colonial claims’. Nor was there any mention of reparations.

The Australian prime minister had no time for equality or impartiality in these vital spheres, for they threatened Australia’s territorial integrity and security, notably white Australia. He was astonished, too, to think that the Japanese had been present in Paris as one of the great powers: ‘Protested strongly against Japan which had made little or no sacrifice being represented at Versailles Council while we were not even consulted or asked for our views,’ he wrote to Watt. A paranoia, the weight of decades of vexation over the British and the Japanese, a heavy ballast of distrust, was stirring in his gut.⁵¹

He let it be known that he would not be bound to 'the chariot-wheel of the Fourteen Points', nor would Australia be bound by any League of Nations, for no country with any gumption would allow its vital frameworks—immigration, tariffs, defence—to be shaped by some international collective, some 'world-State'. For Hughes, the league was a threat to Australian sovereignty which could, in times ahead, imperil the nation's racial integrity.⁵²

Lloyd George assured Hughes that the Fourteen Points would be the basis for discussion at the forthcoming Peace Conference in Paris and decisions would flow from there but, as the historian W. J. Hudson notes, 'Hughes saw British ministers as cautious, reformist and prone to excessive deference towards an antiseptic pedagogue in the White House, and he sought space [at the forthcoming conference] in which to fight his own battles.'⁵³

He would not go there as some affiliate of the British delegation. He would go as the representative of Australia's unique and endangered interests. The Big Power concerns—the Russian Revolution and socialist ferment in Europe, anti-colonialism and the ascendant principle of self-determination, the American pursuit of an 'open door' policy, post-war reconstruction and London's desire to placate Washington—none of that would move Hughes. None of that would intrude upon his primary concerns: New Guinea, white Australia and substantial reparations. He wanted a 'victorious peace', a Carthaginian peace. To the victor go the spoils. His bluntness in this regard was of the old school. He wasted no time in declaring his fear of betrayal:

We along with the Allies, have won, after four years of fearful sacrifice, a decisive victory. We have a right to demand a victorious peace. We have a right to demand that in terms of peace our territorial integrity shall be guaranteed, that those islands, which are the gateways to our citadel, shall be vested in us, not because we want territory but because we desire safety. The terms of Peace do not guarantee that this shall be done... Victory is ours, complete and overwhelming. We have fought for liberty, for right, and national safety; yet in the terms of Peace these rights and ideals are not safeguarded. All is vague and uncertain, where it should be clear and definite.⁵⁴

Above all, Hughes did not believe in the proposed league, for fear that white Australia might be jeopardised. He believed, instead, in drawing the white nations closer together, in a 'great Anglo-Saxon Empire', in the common qualities shared by Englishmen and Canadians, Americans and

Australians. ‘What really mattered,’ as Hudson pithily summarised it, ‘was not grandiose scheming but ties of blood.’⁵⁵

Versailles

‘Australia stands after four years of dreadful war, her interests not guaranteed, her rights of self-government menaced, and with no provision made for indemnities. That is the position and it can hardly be regarded as satisfactory.’

Billy Hughes, 6 November 1918 (quoted in *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, 10 September 1919)

There had never been anything like the assemblage at Versailles for the opening session of the Peace Conference on 18 January 1919. Thirty-two countries were represented by seventy statesmen, each with a bevy of official advisers and assistants, ‘men of all colours, and from every part of the world’, as Billy Hughes put it. The British delegation numbered almost two hundred; the American delegation was larger still. The Australians were a team of six, led by a little man with a reputation for devouring opponents. Clemenceau is reported to have said to Hughes, ‘I have heard that in early life you were a cannibal,’ to which Hughes allegedly replied, ‘That has been greatly exaggerated.’¹

Hughes pursued three vital concerns at the conference—the former German possessions south of the equator, the racial-equality clause proposed by the ever-troublesome Japanese and reparations. He wanted Germany to pay the full cost of the Allies’ war, regardless of the consequences for the German economy or German society. He had shown himself sufficiently ruthless to pursue the total destruction of the German community in Australia. He was nothing if not consistent. He argued

forcefully for harsh economic punishment but he did not win and his readiness to concede probably reflected the weighting of his concerns. Matters of national security—the Pacific islands—and racial integrity were paramount.

Hughes wanted Australian annexation of German New Guinea and its affiliate islands; nothing less than full control, with the power to exclude the Japanese, was essential, in his view, to Australian security. But Woodrow Wilson had enshrined ‘no annexations’ in his principles for the conference. They had to find another way, whereby the word was lost but its meaning won out. The appearance of a compromise was found in the concept of a ‘C class Mandate’ enabling such colonies as New Guinea with small populations and ‘primitive’ cultures to be held in trust by nominated member states, regularly reporting on their progress towards self-government. It was annexation by another name or, as the secretary to the British cabinet told Hughes, ‘the equivalent of a 999-year lease’. The day after this matter was settled, Hughes cabled home to his ministers, telling them that the mandate ‘gave us all the power we want and all the safety too’.²

As with the islands, so with racial equality. The Japanese wished to insert in the covenant of the League of Nations a clause affirming the principle. Hughes was prepared to fight to the end to prevent any clause that affirmed racial equality in principle or law. In fact, for Hughes, there was no such thing as principle, pure and simple. Even the most abstract affirmation of racial equality was a stalking horse which, inevitably, would have practical consequences.

Hughes fought from first to last. He rejected all the wordings and carefully modified rewordings that were put on the table. He said any wording, no matter how mild or inoffensive, would have to expressly exclude rights of immigration and naturalisation. The Japanese would not agree. That suited Hughes. To accept any formulation, he believed, would be political suicide at home. In his notes on one of the amendments he wrote: ‘The Japanese want to insert the proposed amendment into the Preamble. It may be all right. But sooner than agree to it I would rather walk into the Seine—or the Folies Bergère—with my clothes off.’³

If Australia’s war was, in no small part, a war for white Australia, then it follows that the final battle was fought by Billy Hughes, at Versailles, in his

attempt to defeat the racial-equality clause. This campaign is the final chapter in the story behind the story, and it merits a close look.

The Japanese delegates had gone to Paris more in hope than doubt, as the nation had been a reliable ally throughout the war. While firmly believing in the concept of race, Japan railed at the racial hierarchies that refused it equality with the West. After all, it had committed to abandoning ‘backward’ Asia and joining ‘civilised’ Europe. It had rapidly modernised, defeated and humiliated China, forged an alliance with Britain, vanquished Russia, established its own empire, and loyally done its part in the war. Now the expectations were high. President Woodrow Wilson’s resplendent talk about a new world order was received with great enthusiasm in Japan, and the nation appeared to be accepted as an equal at the Peace Conference, an equal among the great powers, one of the big five. The long crusade to have racial equality with the West was imminent, surely? But there was uncertainty too, for Japan was well aware of the racial mindset in both America and the Dominions, notably Australia.

As the Japanese delegation departed for Paris, the nation’s newspapers appeared united in their hope for, above all, some real advance towards the elimination of racial discrimination. The national daily *Asahi Shimbun* looked forward to ‘the vindication of the wrong suffered by other races than the white’, and various outlets took heart from Wilson’s talk of universal brotherhood, unaware, perhaps, of his carefully guarded racist predilections.⁴

The covenant’s prudently crafted clause should be quoted in full:

The equality of nations being a basic principle of the League of Nations, the High Contracting Parties agree that concerning the treatment and rights to be accorded to aliens in their territories, they will not discriminate, either in law or in fact, against any persons on account of his or their race or nationality.⁵

The clause was received cordially by both Britain and the United States but the white-ruled Dominions scuttled it, with Hughes in the vanguard—the sharpest and most uncompromising critic of all. The clause was watered down but there was no form of wording that Hughes would accept. Still the Japanese delegates did not relent. They persisted, seeing themselves as carrying the fight for two-thirds of the world’s population, and perhaps for their own, embryonic plans for an Asia independent of whites. But they made no progress. A. J. Balfour cleverly told them there was, of course,

equality between English and Japanese but he could never endorse the principle of racial equality because no African could be regarded the equal of a European or an American.⁶

Wilson was constrained by his own Southern-gentleman racial convictions, and by the politics of his electoral dependence on the west-coast and Southern states, where Asian immigration was an incendiary topic.⁷ His fears were not dissimilar to Hughes's: any declaration endorsing racial equality could be construed as giving jurisdiction to an international body over immigration, naturalisation and even the franchise; land ownership and marriage, too. Anathema!

Like their counterparts on the west coast of the United States, delegates representing the white-ruled Dominions were determined to banish any mention of racial equality. Hughes led the way, implacable, obstreperous, combative, defiant as ever. The British desire to tread softly with the Japanese was particularly galling. He wrote home to Watt of his sadness at being 'abandoned' by the British delegates: 'The callous disregard of Australian interests by those calling themselves Imperial Statesmen are enough to depress, disgust and sadden any man.'⁸

The American official Colonel Bonsal, Wilson's private translator, wrote about Hughes in his diary: 'Morning, noon and night [he] bellows at poor Lloyd George that if race equality is recognised in the preamble or any other of the articles of the Covenant, he and his people will leave the conference, bag and baggage.'⁹

Other Australians in the delegation shared Hughes's anxiety about the Japanese proposals. John Latham told his wife: 'no government [at home] could live for a day if it tampered with a White Australia.'¹⁰ The Australian delegation, like the Americans, found themselves inundated with resolutions from home, pressing them to hold the line against racial equality.

From Melbourne, the governor-general cabled, warning the colonial secretary in London that Hughes had strong support: 'All parties are unanimous in excluding Asiatics from Australia,' he told Viscount Milner, 'and although not as outspoken as Mr. Hughes, most politicians are anxious that the Southward Expansion of the Japanese should be combatted.' Shortly thereafter, he wrote a droll note to Hughes, declaring his hope that the result of the conference would not be 'inscribed permanently...in the Black Book of the little brown men of Japan'.¹¹

The Japanese continued to lobby, trying to find a formulation that would draw support. They drafted another proposal, hurried along by news of growing public anger at home. This time their clause spoke only of 'principle', with no mention of discrimination in law or in fact.¹² But again, Hughes would not be moved and the other Dominion leaders all referred to the troubles they would have at home, should they accept such a clause.

More meetings followed. The Japanese delegate Baron Makino made one final bid to persuade the key players. He gave a moving speech in favour of a racial-equality clause. He spoke eloquently of the 'wrongs of racial discrimination', which were the subject of 'deep resentment on the part of a large portion of the human race':

The feeling of being slighted has long been a standing grievance with certain peoples. And the announcement of the principle of justice for peoples and nationalities as the basis of future international relationships has so heightened their legitimate aspirations, that they consider it their right that this wrong should be redressed.¹³

This speech garnered considerable support, a clear majority among the delegates of the commission charged with drafting the covenant. But the acceptance of any clause required unanimous consent and the chairman, Sir Robert Cecil, declared the cause lost.

The Americans blamed the British and the Australians; but the Americans did not want a racial-equality clause because, they said, surely with a touch of irony, it would light the 'burning flames of prejudice' and stir the race issue throughout the world.¹⁴ As for the other Dominions, they were more than happy to have Hughes carry the bulk of the blame. And Hughes himself was more than happy to boast that the achievement was a great racial triumph.

How differently might race relations and race alignments have been shaped in the twentieth century had a racial-equality clause been included in the covenant of the League of Nations.¹⁵ The 'burning flames of prejudice' might well have been stirred, as in the United States after the Civil War, where all sorts of white resentments, fears and shocking brutalities were loosed upon African-Americans. Instead, the rejection of racial equality fanned another flame—of anti-colonialism and self-determination in Asia and elsewhere. But none of that mattered to Hughes, for he was an all-or-nothing man.

The Conquering Hero

Hughes returned to Australia promptly after the conference, arriving in Fremantle on 23 August and travelling by train to Melbourne, his every stop besieged by welcoming crowds.¹⁶ He was a conquering hero to those who flocked to see him, many among them returned soldiers. But otherwise, he came home to a distracted and divided land, to a people riven by vast human loss, by economic hardship, state repression, and fierce antagonisms of class and caste. On 10 September, he tabled in the House of Representatives a copy of the Treaty of Versailles, a document, he said, 'of monumental importance'.

His marathon 'Treaty of Peace' speech traversed the mighty struggle in Europe and Palestine, and the heroic part played by the Australians. He spoke at length of how the treaty was arrived at, and what it meant, and of the vital right he had secured, of Australia having its own representation: 'By this recognition Australia became a nation,' he declared. He made no mention of Gallipoli. First to last, not a word.

In addition to that glaring omission, it was a remarkable speech for several reasons, notably the implacably nationalist as opposed to imperial quality of the formulation. The word 'loyalty' was not used. There was no talk of blood ties or of devotion to empire. Empire was mentioned only in passing. And little was said of Britain's fight, save at Villers-Bretonneux where the Australians advanced, said Hughes, through 'the retreating soldiery of the defeated British army'.

Here is how he described Australia's purpose in the Great War:

We went into this conflict for our own national safety, in order to insure our national integrity, which was in dire peril, to safeguard our liberties, and those free institutions of government which, whatever may be our political opinions, are essential to our national life, and to maintain those ideals which we have nailed to the very topmost of our flagpole—White Australia, and those other aspirations of this young Democracy.

Hughes declared his continued opposition to Wilson's Fourteen Points. He insisted that they guaranteed none of the things for which Australia had fought, and yet the things for which Australia fought had only been secured, finally, in the course of the conference. 'The great rampart of islands stretching around the north east of Australia', those islands 'must be held by us or by some power in whom we have absolute confidence', he told his

colleagues. The mandate had secured this, bequeathing to Australia ‘the sovereign power which was necessary for our salvation’.

White Australia, too, was secure. Hughes asked the honourable members on both sides of the House to consider the Paris conference—an assemblage of European powers and also the representatives of hundreds of millions of coloured peoples—to consider the difficulty such people might have in appreciating the ideal of white Australia, the ideal of a mere five million people who had dared to say that ‘this great continent is ours’ and none shall enter lest they be white:

I venture to say, therefore, that perhaps the greatest thing which we have achieved, under such circumstances and in such an assemblage, is the policy of a White Australia. On this matter, I know that I speak for most, if not all, of the people of Australia.

Hughes then spoke at length on the race purity of the nation and its uniqueness in this regard among the nations of the world. ‘After all, this is the foundation of all that Australia stands for,’ he said. For no other nation was pure in this way, pure in blood, pure in language, pure in culture. A white citadel: one people, one race, one tongue.

Later in the speech, Hughes would traverse in detail the unhappy matter of reparations and he would also take some delight in telling the honourable members about his adamant opposition to the racial-equality clause. He wanted his colleagues to be in no doubt about the magnitude of the achievement, the culmination of the war and the peace:

We are more British than the people of Great Britain, and we hold firmly to the great principle of the White Australia, because we know what we know. We have these liberties, and we believe in our race and in ourselves, and in our capacity to achieve our great destiny, which is to hold this vast continent in trust for those of our race who come after us, and who stand with us in the battle of freedom. The White Australia is yours. You may do with it what you please; but, at any rate, the soldiers have achieved the victory, and my colleagues and I have brought that great principle back to you from the Conference. Here it is, at least as safe as it was on the day when it was first adopted by this Parliament.¹⁷

The war was a war for white Australia—for the ‘great principle’—won on the battlefield, and secured at the conference by Billy Hughes. That was the message: the soldiers, and Billy, triumphant. The citadel secured.

In the margin of Hughes’s personal copy of Lloyd George’s *The Truth about Peace Treaties*, alongside a passage on the racial-equality clause, is a note in Hughes’s hand: ‘To L-G a grain of sand: to WMH, Mt. Everest.’

The Politics of Popular Memory, or, The Art of National Forgetting

‘We must...adjust ourselves to the truth that the possibility of our maintaining a claim to racial superiority has passed beyond recall.’

C. E. W. Bean, *The War Aims of a Plain Australian*, 1943

‘Now tell us all about the war,
And what they fought each other for.’
...‘Why that I cannot tell,’ said he;
‘But ’twas a famous victory.’

Robert Southey, ‘The Battle of Blenheim’, 1798

Popular memory of the First World War knows little or nothing of the racial dimension of Australia’s commitment to Gallipoli, the Middle East and the Western Front. There is no place in that memory today for Australia’s obsession with race purity or for the way that race fear—fear of Japan—drove the strategic thinking of the nation’s leaders both before and during the war, with the defence of white Australia at the very heart of their anxieties and deliberations.

In the history books the evasion of Japan begins with the first official historian, C. E. W. Bean. It begins at the beginning, in the introduction and first two chapters of Bean’s *Official History*, which are oddly out of character with the rest of the first volume, for here we encounter a burst of

propaganda writing that would not be out of place alongside the purple prose and falsities of the wartime press. Bean describes the war as a 'crusade' against 'Prussian barbarism'. He writes of the perfect unity of the people of the allied nations, 'almost as loosely associated as the crusaders of old'; yet a 'high moral enthusiasm', he insists, 'more than compensated for their unpreparedness'.¹

Bean proceeds to sketch the racial constituents that made Australian soldiers formidable. Setting to one side his horror of race-mixing, he explains how this offshoot of the British race was a unique and indeed acceptable blending of four strains of blood—English, Scottish, Irish and Welsh: 'whereas in the British Isles those four strains were still comparatively distinct, in Australia they had been blended by intermarriage into a people completely British, but such as existed nowhere else except in New Zealand.'

Environment, too, had played a part. In the 'open air climate' of Australia, with a 'greater abundance of food' and the invigorations of 'bush life', a superior strain of Anglo-Saxondom had evolved, bigger, stronger, more independently minded, 'cut loose from tradition and authority', enriched by the creed of mateship and endowed with a 'vigorous and unfettered initiative'.²

Mateship was particularly important. Not only did it ensure that men would fight fiercely for one another, it also guaranteed that 'without question' Australians would rally to war alongside England, 'rallying to an old friend in danger—Australia's oldest friend'. At this point Bean's poetic inclinations colour his prose, again, to a shade of purple:

Yet those who understood the Australian even indifferently well were aware that, if a breath stirred which seemed to portend harm to any member of the family of nations to which he belonged, at that moment an emotion ran deep through the heart of the Australian people. The men who did not wave flags, who hated to show sentiment, who spent their day jogging round the paddock fences on horseback in dungaree trousers, with eyes inscrutable in the shade of an old felt hat, men who gave dry answers and wrote terse letters—these [men] became alert as a wild bull who raises his head, nostrils wide, at the first scent of danger.³

And so, according to Bean, Australia went to war.

But the official historian does not entirely neglect the background. Bean provides a thin sketch of the defence preparations, army and navy, prior to the war, 1902–14. He notes the reluctance of the Dominions to engage in any 'provisional scheme for the sending abroad of a force in war'. He

writes of how a degree of empire-wide uniformity in training, equipment and the schooling of officers was achieved in this period; of how a 'national army' came into being, a bipartisan creation, but Labor Party leaders, he argues, were the prime movers. He names them—Fisher and Pearce, and Hughes, who was 'Attorney-General in the Fisher government, [and] who had been for years convinced that Australia would someday have to fight for her existence'.⁴

Fight whom? There is not a word about Japan. The underlying strategic dilemma is entirely absent. Asia and the Pacific do not figure here. Nor do they appear when Bean turns to Australia's 'provision for naval defence'. He puts this provision down to 'resolute nationalism' that was heedless of the massive cost. The questions 'why?' and 'why then?' slip by unattended. From beginning to end, the cause of Australia's preparation for war is framed in terms of racial solidarity, filial loyalty and romantic idealism in the face of Teutonic evil.

Japan has a cameo, with the battleship *Ibuki* figuring in the safe passage of the first AIF to the Middle East. The theme of race fear is entirely absent. So, too, a rather obvious point: in flanking the convoy to Egypt, the Japanese warship was protecting the soldiers of a nation whose leadership had vilified them as a people for more than a decade.

As a literary effort, Bean's introductory chapters probably warm the heart of Anzac devotees. As history, these crucial chapters amount to an exercise in obfuscation. 'Thus,' he writes:

The liberty which the younger British nations enjoyed had resulted in naval and military preparations exactly in keeping with that liberty. From the moment when the Australian began to organise his own national army and navy, they became forces of serious size and efficiency. But whether he sent these or any force to participate in any war, was a matter for his free decision when the occasion arose.⁵

Bean's evasion here is all the more obvious when we consider what we know of his background. He was, as we saw in chapter one, as steeped in race fear as were Deakin, Hughes, Pearce, Cook and others in the upper echelons of Commonwealth politics. He believed, like Hughes and company, that Australia's destiny would be played out in the Pacific. He believed that a formidable challenge facing Australia was the racial challenge—the threat of Japan to the survival of white Australia. Bean thought Australia the 'last land open to the white man', the last bastion of pure Anglo-Saxon blood. He was well aware that fear of Japan was the

strategic motive *behind* Australia's preparation for war and its commitment throughout the war. And as he worked away on the first of his great volumes, he was ever sensitive to ongoing concerns focussed on Japan, post-war. He was in lockstep with Hughes and the government of the Commonwealth, and committed to writing an account of the war that would evade the issue. After all, the official historian was not about to argue that Australians had died in their tens of thousands to safeguard the nation against the race pollution of a loyal ally.⁶

Perhaps more puzzling is Bean's commentary on the extremely sensitive matter of an 'expeditionary force' for service overseas. Such a plan 'officially had no existence', he writes, a curious formulation, and certainly accurate. And he proceeds to tell a tale of pre-war preparations so contrary to the facts that the scope of his knowledge must remain a mystery. Bean writes of how, in 1913, 'New Zealand agreed to a definite scheme for an expeditionary force' but Australia held back, fearing the existence of such a force would almost certainly guarantee its use, by Britain. At this point, Senator George Pearce figures in the account. In 1912, according to Bean, Pearce met with a New Zealand counterpart to discuss the creation of an expeditionary force for mutual co-operation should either nation ever be invaded. Details were thrashed out, but 'At the outbreak of war it had not been effectively organised.'⁷

Historians have noted that Bean's *Official History* was unusual in that it was subject to no censorship. But, as Ken Inglis observes, 'the author nevertheless imposed a sort of censorship on himself, by omitting nasty details.'⁸ Inglis is referring to the gory horrors of the battlefield and painful truths associated with less-than-competent leadership, but the self-censorship went far further than the battlefield. Bean would write his six volumes and would oversee the rest, never permitting more than a hint of the underlying strategic context to appear.

The *Official History* is a remarkable achievement by a remarkable man who combined scholarly aptitude, moral vision, great courage and endurance to produce a monumental work, unique in its time, with ordinary soldiers 'the subject of his narrative to an extent unprecedented in official military historiography', as Inglis notes. But it is equally important to acknowledge that Bean, with his work's blinkered context, set the template for our understanding of the war—and historians stayed true to it for generations. The buried history of race fear in the scholarship of the war

begins with the official historian. And a century later, this particular race theme is still absent, obliterated from popular tradition, submerged beneath a misplaced patriotism.

The Heirs to David Sissons

It was not that race was absent from the collective memory of the war in the first instance, for the war was remembered as a racial triumph, as the ‘blood baptism’ of this ‘offshoot of the British race’, and it was celebrated as confirmation that race evolution in the far southern land was onward and upward. The family tree also had to be modified—‘Teutonic cousins’ hurriedly became ‘barbarous Huns’.⁹ What was absent was the part played by race fear in the strategic domain. If diplomacy encouraged continued silence, the Anzac Legend assured it. The fear of Japan, the empire’s unfailing ally, had figured mightily in the politics and diplomacy of the pre-war years and throughout the war, and again in the aftermath. The subject ran entirely contrary to the official position and cherished Anzac understandings in all their variation—the tale of a nation, the loyal offshoot, in lockstep with Britain for King and Country. The race-fear story lay buried for half a century.

Not until the 1950s did a scholar produce a major study of the history of Australia–Japan relations with appropriate attention to this dimension, and to its impact on foreign policy and defence. D. C. S. (David) Sissons, a mature-age student at the University of Melbourne, was awarded an MA in political science in 1956 for a study entitled ‘Attitudes to Japan and Defence, 1890–1923’.¹⁰

To a considerable extent, Sissons’ work ran against the national grain because, after the Second World War, it was impossible for most Australians to think dispassionately about Japan. The war in Asia and the Pacific did as much to entrench white racism as fascism in Europe did to discredit it. Fanatical hatred of the Japanese was near universal in Australia. Historical animosities were now burnt into the Australian consciousness with the memory of Changi and the Thai-Burma railway: the searing images of skeletal prisoners of war, of executions by way of beheading, and press coverage of war-crimes trials after the war. In the late 1940s Arthur Calwell, the immigration minister, captured the never-forgetting and never-forgiving mood:

No Japanese will be permitted to enter this country. They cannot come as the wives of Australian servicemen...nor as businessmen to buy from or sell to us...The feelings of the mothers and wives of the Australian victims of Japanese savagery are more important than any trade or other material advantage.¹¹

But, for some Australians, the experience of the war had undermined the racial certainties that had guided the nation for decades. The horrors of Hitler's extermination camps dealt a great blow to policies that were openly based on notions of racial superiority and exclusiveness. Revelations of the Holocaust and the progression of post-war decolonisation undermined the confidence and affection that many Australians had attached to race purity.

Charles Bean is a case in point, for Bean was nothing if not true to his moral compass and to his nation. His transformation mirrored the collapse of faith in race thinking in Western intellectual thought, a transformation which culminated in the UNESCO 'Statement on Race' published in 1950. For much of his life, Bean had assumed that certain qualities characterised certain races. But the experience of the Second World War revealed how ideas of racial character and racial superiority had produced atrocities on a vast scale. He now understood that brutality and cruelty were no more 'in the blood', as he put it, than courage or gentleness. And the cause or causes of war rarely rested with one nation.¹² Well before the end of the war he would make his views known, honesty trumping vanity as ever. He called for a gradual relaxation of the White Australia policy.¹³

Bean's biographer Peter Rees suggests that the war historian's doubts about racial thinking might trace back many years (perhaps hurried along by his friendship with the writer, broadcaster and teacher Kurt Offenburg) but it is certain that, by the end of the Second World War, Bean was ready to endorse a new way of thinking about race and character. And after the war, as ever given to self-scrutiny, he continued to be troubled by the racial assumptions of his earlier thinking and writing. In an open letter to the *Sydney Morning Herald* published in 1953, he declared that science and the course of history now proved 'beyond doubt' that blood had nothing to do with character or human behaviour, good or bad. And on the awful subject of war crimes, he wrote:

Wartime propaganda *everywhere* found very receptive soil in the practically universal belief that the moral qualities of any nation are innate—'in the blood' as we often say. I now understand that biology has completely disproved this idea; at any rate history does. You do not have to go far into this grim field to find that ancestors whose bodies and brains were presumably no different from our

own, meted out to the unfortunate Jews of York and elsewhere treatment extraordinarily reminiscent of that inflicted by Hitler and his Nazis.¹⁴

If this re-evaluation was imperative for Bean, he was at least fortunate in one sense—he was not alone, as Edward Pulsford and Bruce Smith had been alone, or almost alone, in the Senate and the House of Representatives, respectively, in 1901. In Australia, a new spirit was abroad among influential scholars, public figures in politics and some sections of the press.

In the years following the Second World War the institutional foundations for a radical shift away from white Australia were laid. At the National Library of Australia, the chief librarian, Harold White, put in place a program for an Asian collection ‘in all languages on a scale far more comprehensive than in the past’. Australian universities began to introduce Asian studies, notably at the new Australian National University, where the Research School of Pacific Studies formed to drive Australian understanding of, and engagement with, the ‘neighbourhood’. The importance of the RSPS and of the ANU in general cannot be underestimated, as they brought together a community of interacting elites focussed on Asia and the Pacific to work on a range of related issues, including race fear and its consequences for Australian foreign policy and diplomacy. And, it must be added, the destruction of Aboriginal society.¹⁵

In this new setting, a small number of historians and political scientists embarked on studies of race relations in Australia and the history of Australian relations with Asia.¹⁶ One of these scholars was David Sissons, a linguist in military intelligence during the war, a defence interpreter in war-crimes trials on the island of Moratai in November 1945 and a veteran of the British Commonwealth Force in Allied Occupied Japan, based in Ube. Sissons was one of thousands of young Australians who experienced the devastation of post-war Japan at first hand through his service with the Occupation force. But as an interpreter he was closer to Japanese perspectives than most of his colleagues.

Thereafter, Sissons returned to the University of Melbourne and completed his undergraduate arts degree, graduating in 1950. Between 1951 and 1955 he was a tutor in international relations there, as well as a research assistant to William Macmahon Ball, then the head of political science. Macmahon Ball was a charismatic scholar, radio broadcaster and activist who had served as the British Commonwealth representative on the Allied Council for Japan in 1946–47, before returning to Melbourne, where his

teaching and writing on Asia exercised a great influence on many students, including Sissons, who subsequently took up a research fellowship at the ANU in 1961.¹⁷

Sissons' master's thesis has been described as 'the most consulted unpublished thesis on Australian history in existence'.¹⁸ It provided an invaluable compendium of detail and a template for those scholars who followed in the field. His was the first comprehensive survey of Australian relations with Asia, with an emphasis on 'opinion'—reactions to Japanese military and naval power, the ebb and flow of race anxieties as evidenced in newspaper articles, parliamentary and military records, and invasion-scare literature. It covered Japan as a defence threat from the time of the Sino-Japanese war (1894–95) to the Washington Naval Conference (1921–22); and the findings, broadly speaking, have been as much elaborated as amended by the beneficiaries of Sissons' work—the scholars who picked up the theme and published in the 1960s and 1970s, and the decades since.¹⁹

These are the scholars whose work I have principally drawn upon in the preceding chapters. Their studies constitute the core historiography on the otherwise untold story of the Australian predicament—distrust of Britain and fear of Japan—the literature of abandonment anxiety and race fear.²⁰

The heirs to David Sissons have laboured long and hard, building progressively if not always consistently on the work of their forebears, each of them making an important contribution to our understanding of the relationship between race fear and defence policy, to our grasp of the way that doubt and fear—the doubting of Britain, the fear of Japan—shaped both policy and diplomacy in the war years before 1914, the years of fighting and the peace thereafter. And in so doing they have exposed the shallowness that marks the popular understanding of the war. Why, then, does that shallow understanding still prevail?

The Memory-Makers

Professional history and popular memory have an uneasy relationship because, in shaping the latter, contemporary politics plays a much greater part than historical scholarship. In the process of formulating the national story, history is at best selectively exploited. Poets, film-makers, novelists,

journalists, shock jocks, hard-pressed teachers, politicians, the Department of Veterans Affairs, old soldiers on commemorative missions, government-funded museums: all play a more decisive role in shaping popular memory than do professional scholars in the field.

The paramount tendency of these memory-makers is to reduce war to a powerful story of the nobility and the horror of it all, and otherwise to evade the intricacies and discomforts of the documented past. Popular memory of war—or collective memory, as it is sometimes called—tends, unsurprisingly, to be heroic and sentimental. It is far more inclined to be literary or poetic in its search for past meaning. ‘Anzac Day lives, evolves and reinvents. This is its cultural genius,’ writes the journalist Paul Kelly.²¹ But the genius lies equally in its evasions.

Australians’ shared memories of war have been largely forged in spite of the available scholarship. Thus, the power of popular memory does not lie in its accurate or sophisticated mapping of strategic contexts, but rather in establishing storylines from the heart of war, storylines that articulate and reinforce an affirmative message about the nation and national character.

In a commemorative process focussed on military history, narrowly framed to highlight battles, to celebrate the mettle of our soldiers and to mourn their suffering, what hope is there for the wider context of foreign policy and diplomacy? What chance Asia, or white Australia? The makers of popular memory are constantly short-changing the citizenry, confounding the struggle of memory against forgetting. We are, as Humphrey McQueen has argued, ‘taught to forget’.²²

Politicians play an important part in this blinkering of popular memory. Prime ministers in recent decades have been striving to go one better than their predecessor in the hyperbole department, fusing reverential occasion with the celebration of worthy values. In 2015, Tony Abbott appeared to be pressing the Anzacs into something like sainthood:

Yes, they are us; and when we strive enough for the right things, we can be more like them.
So much has changed in one hundred years; *but not the things that really matter*.
Duty, selflessness, moral courage: always these remain the mark of a decent human being.
They did their duty; now let us do ours.
They gave us an example; now let us be worthy of it.²³

Duty, selflessness and moral courage are indeed things that really matter, but they should not matter to the exclusion of historical context, to the exclusion of so much else that really matters.

Abbott was speaking, of course, on Anzac Day. Commemorative anniversaries are particularly important, while monuments anchor memory in fixed and tangible sites. They draw the collective attention, confirming the notion of a common memory, a shared understanding. They are central to the memory-shaping process, year in, year out, with a reach that is far beyond the reach of scholarly tomes.

Popular memory also draws fierce defenders—shock jocks, right-wing politicians and allied intellectuals—who will brook no critical reconfiguration of the Anzac Legend. The past, in their hands, is sacred and immutable. Scholars who disrupt the narrative are sometimes labelled ‘traitors’—in the tabloid press the vehemence can be as illiberal as that.²⁴ These enforcers are in good company with autocratic regimes where historical debate must be tame, or it is branded treacherous or dangerous to the state.²⁵ Their commitment to, in a certain sense, the end of History takes the form of a dogmatic attachment to a simple, sacrosanct past, and it runs utterly contrary to the true spirit and practise of the discipline.²⁶

But in democracies, at least—where we are still free to argue, even if the rhetorical forces of romance and sentiment outweigh the forces of critical restoration—there is room for contention and controversy, for argument about what is the more appropriate or valid narrative for a modern nation, a mature nation. What that nation remembers can and does change, but only with vigorous debate and only when the conditions are ripe for change. Uncomfortable truths are not easily resurrected, but this can happen with the eruption of formerly unheard or marginalised voices, or with the piecemeal accumulation of scholarship over time. Or both. As Inga Clendinnen observed: ‘In human affairs, there is never a single narrative. There is always one counter-story, and usually several, and in a democracy you will probably get to hear them.’

Australians were plunged into the First World War to help save Britain from Germany and to preserve the British empire as they knew it. But they were also there to serve the racial agenda of their leaders, an agenda more than a decade in the making. In this regard, the terrible human cost was the price paid for the future-proofing of white Australia. It was a down payment in search of a guarantee.

This history is absent from popular memory. The absence is understandable, given the politics of commemoration, the piecemeal evolution of scholarly research and our post-Holocaust sensibility—the

horrors of the twentieth century, the legacy of race fanaticism in the form of Nazism, the eventual ignominy of white Australia, and so on. Some Australians may feel we have a racist past best forgotten.

And there are further complications. The historical literature on race fear, the strategic motivation behind Australia's preparation for the First World War, is necessarily dense. Tomes on diplomacy and foreign policy cannot match stirring tales of battle and sacrifice. Popular culture has an enormous appetite for vicarious intensity. It is easy to see how tales of suffering and bravery appeal to a language of the heart that short-circuits reason and critical enquiry, and satisfies as history. The power of visceral feelings to blot out context cannot be underestimated. We look back with awe and bewilderment, astonished and humbled, at what that generation achieved and endured. But when emotion becomes the measure of things, we are missing the big picture.²⁷

Perhaps we should not be surprised at the absence of the race theme, for many decades of scholarship and journalism in the combatant nations have largely dwelled on the Western Front and the mutual butchery of white men fighting for Britain, France and Germany. The focus has been far more attentive to the European and Dominion soldiery than to the non-white soldiers and labourers who were mobilised in vast numbers for the war in Europe and elsewhere. As David Olusoga notes in *The World's War* (2014), this war was the first true world war, 'in that it was the first in which peoples and nations from across the globe fought and laboured alongside one another, rarely in equality other than the equality of suffering'. Lost from sight was not only the geographic reach of the war but also its basic demographics.

More words have been written about the few dozen officers who wrote their war memoirs and penned their war poetry than about the four million non-whites, non-European soldiers who fought for Britain, France and their allies, let alone the millions of civilians who laboured at war work or who suffered hardships and loss when the war swept through their communities [far from Europe].

The absence of Japan in Australia's fragment of the war complements the absence, until recently, of non-white peoples from the war in general.²⁸ It is a myth within a myth.

Best We Remember

The literature on Australia's forgotten predicament—distrust of Britain and fear of Japan—is more than sufficient to provide understanding where formerly there was a void. But, with the exception of *A New Britannia*, this literature is not pitched to a general readership. Nor can we assume one voice coming from military historians and specialists in the history of Australian foreign policy and diplomacy. There are differences of interpretation and emphasis among the historians who have informed the preceding chapters, notably the scholars whose work forms the core historiography on the subject. And there is fierce opposition from a small number of historians who are wedded to the narrative of imperial solidarity and to the absence of Asia that prevails in popular memory.²⁹

The Oxford Companion to Australian Military History (1995) is a case in point. It contains a four-page entry on 'Humour', which has 'played an important part in Australians' images of their military heroes', but there is no entry for race, race fear or white Australia; while Japan as ally is dealt with cursorily, under the subject title 'Japanese Threat', which is mostly about Japanese–Australian relations after the First World War. Similarly, the entry on Billy Hughes is startling for its evasions, for the author manages to summarise Hughes's political career without reference to his racial obsessions and his fanatical commitment to race purity between 1884, when he arrived in Australia, and the close of 1918. The entry for C. E. W. Bean is bowdlerised in the same way and to the same degree, his racial thought disguised as his 'romantic belief in rural values'. The *Oxford Companion* is dutifully consistent with the sentimental narrative that prevails, in the popular understanding of the First World War. And at the nation's premier commemorative site, the Australian War Memorial, you will search in vain for any sign of the race theme.

What's missing from this narrative, as the historical record clearly shows, is Japan, and everything that follows from its inclusion in the story. The fear among Australia's leaders was not German 'barbarism' alone but Japanese expansionism, not just Western Europe but the Asia-Pacific as well. This was a fear that stirred years of unhappy tension and contention between Australia and Britain, up to and throughout the First World War. And it is this fear that explains the unrelenting agitation of the leading figures in successive Australian governments, most notably the racial anxieties of Alfred Deakin and the bluntly racist phobias of William Morris Hughes, Senator George Pearce and more.

Among the paramount concerns of these key figures and their adherents in the political, military and diplomatic fields was the sanctity of Australia's race purity. They were united in their determination to retain Australia for the white man. Australia's commitment to the European war—first made, secretly, in 1911—was a commitment in search of a guarantee that Britain would side with Australia against all forms of Asian aggression in the years to come, whether demands for the dismantling of the White Australia policy or, in the worst case, outright invasion by an Asian power. It is this fear that explains Prime Minister Billy Hughes's appeal to his fellow countrymen in October 1916—to fight for white Australia in France.

Hughes called the war a 'racial war', and in this understanding he was not alone. At the highest levels, on both sides of the Australian parliament, the racial dimension of Australia's commitment to the European war was clearly understood. We have to revisit this sidelined history in order to understand how it was that 'Asia'—Japan, in particular—had a central role in shaping Australian defence thinking between 1905 and 1920, from Tsushima to Versailles.

Last, the assumption of a common interest with Britain—the sentimental notion of imperial solidarity, two nations in lockstep for King and Country, and liberty—is at best a half-truth, for it had become abundantly clear in the years prior to the First World War that British and Australian strategic concerns were not one and the same. Indeed, in some respects they were sharply at odds. Thus, to summarise briefly a substantial field of scholarship: where we assume filial loyalty, there was also deep suspicion and regular disputation; where we see sentimental attachment, there was also profound misgiving; and where we assume mutual support and reciprocity, there was, in Australia's case, great insecurity, distrust and fear of abandonment in years to come.

The preparations for the First World War and ultimately the shape of the commitment were driven, to a significant degree, by white Australia's sense of vulnerability in the Pacific, by various nightmare scenarios in which Australia could be left to fend for itself, unaided by Britain. And they were driven by the determination to have racial purity at almost any cost. Or, as Hughes put it, prior to Gallipoli: 'My own [opinion] is and always has been in favour of sending every man we could rake up.' It was a war fought, he said in 1919, for 'the great principle of White Australia'.³⁰

Should we continue to commemorate and celebrate the First World War in the ways that we do, blinkered and sanitised, free of its racial context and racial core? Or should we see the war for what it was—not only a war against Germany and its allies, but a race war which prefigured the nation's arduous transition to an acceptance that all of us, regardless of colour, share a common and equal humanity?

Best We Forget is an ironic title. We do well to remember the Great War: the battlefield ordeals and the soldiers' sacrifice. Yet, in the course of bringing a nation into being and fostering it to maturity, sacrifice takes many forms. We might also remember that nations are built as much in peace as in war; negotiators and conciliators count as much as warriors; inventors and visionaries have shaped Australia's evolution at least as decisively as have the great generals; and, thankfully, debate and compromise have done more to shape our political culture than have the bayonet or the gun. We might also remember that across the twentieth century there were figures, heroic men and women, who led the struggle against racism. And we might, in time, expand our national story of the war, honouring the past—however troubling we may find it—with a care to match our perpetual commemoration of the Anzacs.

Notes

Chapter 1: A Racial Epic—The Anzac Legend

- 1 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 June 1907. This essay on national character was Part IV of a series called ‘Australia’, written by Bean and published by the *Herald* over June and July of 1907. Bean was born in Bathurst, New South Wales, in 1879, but educated for the most part in England, at Clifton College and Oxford, where he read classics, honed his prose style and subsequently studied law. He sailed for Sydney in 1904. See Peter Rees, *Bearing Witness: The Remarkable Life of Charles Bean, Australia’s Greatest War Correspondent*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2016, chs 1–4.
- 2 Bean in *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 June 1907.
- 3 Bean in *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 June 1907.
- 4 Bean in *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 June 1907.
- 5 *Spectator*, 13 July 1907.
- 6 Quoted in Rees, *Bearing Witness*, p. 47.
- 7 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 August 1908. Quoted in Neville Meaney, *The Search for Security in the Pacific, 1901–14. A History of Australian Defence and Foreign Policy, 1901–23: Volume 1*, Sydney University Press, 1976, p. 168.
- 8 Quoted in Humphrey McQueen, *A New Britannia* (1970), Penguin, Ringwood, 1975, p. 102.
- 9 C. E. W. Bean, *With the Flagship in the South*, T. Werner Laurie, London, c. 1909, p. 130.
- 10 Richard White, *Inventing Australia: Images and Identity, 1688–1980*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1981, pp. 70–71. See also David Cannadine’s short history of the rise and fall of the concept of race in *The Undivided Past: Humanity Beyond Our Differences*, Knopf, New York, 2013, ch. 5. On the concern about ‘convict blood’ see Babette Smith, *Australia’s Birthstain: The Startling Legacy of the Convict Era*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2008.
- 11 Bean, ‘The Country Problem: The Real Australian’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 July 1907.
- 12 Bean, diary entry, 29 August 1915. Australian War Memorial (AWM) 38 3DRL 606/116.
- 13 K. S. Inglis assisted by Jan Brazier, *Sacred Places: War Memorials in the Australian Landscape*, Miegunyah Press, Melbourne, 1998, p. 82.
- 14 Peter Dennis, Jeffrey Grey, Ewan Morris & Robin Prior (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Australian Military History* (1995), Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1999, p. 88, advises that the histories sold on average about one hundred thousand copies each. The marketing campaign behind these sales should also be acknowledged.
- 15 Bean, diary entry, 24 February 1918. AWM 38 3DRL 606/116. Quoted in Rees, *Bearing Witness*, p. 344.
- 16 Whether officially censored or self-censored and thereby conforming to official requirements, we cannot know. As I show in chapter ten, Bean’s evasion in the first volume of the *Official History*

is remarkable for both its claims and its silences regarding the strategic context for the war.

- 17 C. E. W. Bean, *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918. Volume 1: The Story of Anzac: From the Outbreak of the War to the End of the First Phase of the Gallipoli Campaign, May 4, 1915* (1921), University of Queensland Press in association with the Australian War Memorial, 1981, p. 607. The trinity of nation, race and empire as evident in the behaviour of the AIF abroad is discussed in Peter Stanley, “‘He Was Black, He Was a White Man, and a Dinkum Aussie’: Race and Empire in Revisiting the Anzac Legend”, in Santanu Das (ed.), *Race, Empire and First World War Writing*, Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp. 213–30.
- 18 Extract from Ashmead-Bartlett’s dispatch, in John Hirst, *The Australians: Insiders and Outsiders on the National Character Since 1770*, Black Inc., Melbourne, 2007, pp. 46–48.
- 19 Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett, *Despatches from the Dardanelles: An Epic of Heroism*, George Newnes, London, 1915, pp. 49–50. ‘No finer feat of arms has been performed during the war than this sudden landing in the dark, this storming of the heights, and, above all, the holding on to positions thus won whilst reinforcements were being poured from the transports.’ (pp. 77–78.)
- 20 Philip Butterss, *An Unsentimental Bloke: The Life and Work of C. J. Dennis*, Wakefield Press, Kent Town, 2014, p. 112.
- 21 White, *Inventing Australia*, p. 127. The Racial Hygiene Association was founded in Sydney that same year, 1916.
- 22 Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Oxford University Press, 1977, ch. 4.
- 23 Butterss, *An Unsentimental Bloke*, p. 114. Butterss also points to Dennis’s contribution in *Moods* to the talk of conscription, for ‘there’ll never be the need to call too loud for fighting men among the Southern breed.’
- 24 A. B. Paterson, ‘We’re All Australians Now’, *Complete Poems*, A&R Classics, Sydney, 2001, p. 308.
- 25 John Masefield, *Gallipoli*, Heinemann, London, 1916, p. 19.
- 26 Murdoch’s part in perhaps the most notorious campaign of disinformation during the war is discussed in Tom D. C. Roberts, *Before Rupert: Keith Murdoch and the Birth of a Dynasty*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 2015, p. 67. These were the propaganda stories about German industry boiling down human corpses for ‘margarine’, oil and other products.
- 27 Roberts, *Before Rupert*, ch. 3. On Murdoch in London see also L. F. Fitzhardinge, *The Little Digger, 1914–1952: William Morris Hughes: A Political Biography*, vol. 2, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1979, pp. 74–75.
- 28 *Sun*, 1 October 1915. Quoted in Roberts, *Before Rupert*, p. 49.
- 29 Roberts, *Before Rupert*, pp. 58–59.
- 30 Tom D. C. Roberts, ‘Australia Day, 1921’. Unpublished essay—copy in author’s possession.
- 31 *Hero of the Dardanelles*, a re-enactment of the Gallipoli landing, was filmed only weeks after the actual events. See National Film and Sound Archives online: shop.nfsa.gov.au/hero-of-the-dardanelles-the-gallipoli-centenary
- 32 One of the most powerful and prominent fragments of the Anzac Legend was the legend of the man with the donkey, John Simpson Kirkpatrick, a simple tale with a complicated history. It was a ‘little epic’ in its own right, a legend with many makers, Bean included. See Peter Cochrane, *Simpson and the Donkey: The Making of a Legend* (1992), Melbourne University Press, 2013, esp. pp. 1–9.
- 33 Hughes in *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates (CPD)*, 10 September 1919, p. 12175.
- 34 H. J. Diddams (ed.), *Anzac Day Sermons and Addresses*, Brisbane, 1921, pp. 78–79. In the courts, too, fear of Asia was cause, at least in one case, for the severe punishment of a hapless midwife who had apparently caused the death of a pregnant woman. ‘We have within a few weeks’ sail of

us Asiatic people whose annual increase far exceeds the whole of our population,’ said the judge in delivering a sentence of seven years’ imprisonment in 1919, ‘and yet this crime is directed towards the destruction of the national increase.’ Case cited in Judith Allen, *Sex and Secrets: Crimes Involving Australian Women Since 1880*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1990, p. 106.

- 35 C. E. W. Bean, *In Your Hands, Australians*, London, 1918, pp. 38–40, 43. Not surprisingly, Bean shared with many others the anxiety about the empty spaces of the country’s north: ‘we must get people; and we must solve the problem of how our race, *and no other*, can live in the north of Australia.’ (Emphasis added.)

Chapter 2: Space Invaders

- 1 Australia’s security concerns from the mid-nineteenth century through to the twenty-first century are surveyed in Stuart Ward, ‘Security: Defending Australia’s Empire’, in Deryck M. Schreuder & Stuart Ward (eds), *Australia’s Empire*, Oxford, New York, 2008, pp. 232–58. Rival conceptions of defence policy and nagging doubt about the security offered by the British fleet across the better part of a century are core themes.
- 2 ‘They [the British] refused to complicate their international posture by pressing Australian claims. Rather, [they] were inclined to look upon the islands as pawns which could be used in bargaining over more vital territorial and diplomatic problems closer to home.’ Meaney, *The Search for Security in the Pacific, 1901–14*, p. 9.
- 3 On the hostility to ‘remote dictation’ and the expectations of entitlement embodied in the concepts of British liberty and loyalty, see Peter Cochrane, *Colonial Ambition: Foundations of Australian Democracy*, Melbourne University Press, 2006.
- 4 Quoted in Ward, ‘Security: Defending Australia’s Empire’, p. 236.
- 5 Roger C. Thompson, *Australian Imperialism in the Pacific: The Expansionist Era 1820–1920*, Melbourne University Press, 1980, p. 92. Geoffrey Serle’s entry on James Service in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* is a helpful summary: ‘He believed in the empire’s civilising mission and in Australia’s imminent destiny as a great nation. Part of the empire’s “great and noble mission” was to elevate the South Seas savage through its Australian colonists. But the British government had to recognise both the legitimate regional interests of the colonies and their right to consultation. The Colonial Office officials saw him as a disloyal, ignorant blunderer, until German and French actions in the Pacific induced some review. He was indeed unaware of the wider diplomatic context; but he was a harbinger both of new imperial enthusiasm and of the definition of Australian regional interests.’ (Vol. 6, Melbourne University Press, 1976.)
- 6 McQueen, *A New Britannia*, pp. 64–65.
- 7 J. A. La Nauze, *Alfred Deakin: A Biography*, Melbourne University Press, 1965, pp. 97–100. ‘Neither Britain nor France was seriously interested in these cannibal islands, but the vehemence of their Pacific colonists required them to take notice.’ (p. 97.)
- 8 Lord Salisbury to Sir Henry Holland, 27 April 1887. Quoted in La Nauze, *Alfred Deakin*, p. 104.
- 9 Greg Watters, ‘Contaminated by China’, in David Walker & Agnieszka Sobocinska (eds), *Australia’s Asia: From Yellow Peril to Asian Century*, UWA Publishing, Crawley, 2012, p. 27.
- 10 *Australasian* quoted in McQueen, *A New Britannia*, p. 58.
- 11 ‘It would have been difficult at the time [1881] to find someone in Sydney who was unaffected by fear of contagion and the resulting upheaval.’ Raelene Allen, ‘Smallpox Epidemic 1881’, *Dictionary of Sydney*: dictionaryofsydney.org/entry/smallpox_epidemic_1881
- 12 Quoted in Raymond Evans et al., *Race Relations in Colonial Queensland: A History of Exclusion, Exploitation and Extermination*, University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 1975, p. 361.

- 13 *Boomerang*, no. 22, 14 April 1888, p. 3.
- 14 Lane quoted in McQueen, *A New Britannia*, p. 48.
- 15 *Boomerang*, no. 15, 25 February – 5 May 1888, pp. 8–9. The invasion-narrative phenomenon is discussed in David Walker, *Anxious Nation: Australia and the Rise of Asia 1850–1939*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1999, ch. 8. See also David Walker, ‘Shooting Mabel: Warrior Masculinity and Asian Invasion’, *History Australia*, vol. 2, no. 3, 2005.
- 16 *Official Report of the National Australian Convention Debates, Sydney 2 March to 9 April 1891*, Sydney, 1891, p. 316. (13 March 1891.)
- 17 Alfred Deakin, *The Federal Story*, Appendix II, p. 179. Quoted in Meaney, *The Search for Security in the Pacific, 1901–14*, p. 34. (Emphasis added.)
- 18 See Walker, *Anxious Nation*, pp. 40–41. For a biographical summary of Adams see Stephen Murray-Smith, ‘Adams, Francis William’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vol. 3.
- 19 *National Life and Character: A Forecast*, Macmillan & Co., 1896, p. 16. Pearson was English born, the son of an Anglican clergyman. He held various posts, including professor of history at King’s College, London, before coming to Australia, where he became minister for public instruction in Victoria and gained a well-earned reputation for radical liberalism in the realm of land-tax policy and women’s higher education. Like Deakin, Pearson combined the high ideals of liberalism with firm views on white-race superiority in the colonial world, though Deakin was not as pessimistic as his mentor.
- 20 Quoted in McQueen, *A New Britannia*, p. 49.
- 21 Quoted in McQueen, *A New Britannia*, pp. 114, 55.
- 22 *Boomerang*, no. 15, 25 February 1888, pp. 4–5.
- 23 Deakin quoted in Myra Willard, *History of the White Australia Policy to 1920*, Melbourne University Press, 1923, p. 119. One satire of hostile Australian responses to Asia is Rosa Campbell Praed’s *Madame Izan: A Tourist Story* (1899), discussed in David Walker, ‘Rising Suns’, in Walker & Sobocinska (eds), *Australia’s Asia*, pp. 79–80.
- 24 La Nauze, *Alfred Deakin*, p. 108.
- 25 Deakin was fiercely loyal to the idea of empire and to its practical advantages for Australia, but he was also convinced that on too many questions over too many years Australia’s interests had often been ignored, or overridden by empire priorities elsewhere. The political and constitutional background to this perspective, in the nineteenth-century colonial experience, is the subject of Cochrane, *Colonial Ambition*.
- 26 On the cultural charm of Japan and the appeal of japonaiserie in Europe and the settler colonies, see Walker, *Anxious Nation*, ch. 5. Walker writes of how, as early as the 1880s, two distinct notions of Asia were shaping in the Australian imagination—a ‘degenerate’ Asia and a ‘formidable’ and cultured Asia, the latter being Japan.
- 27 I. Takeda, ‘Australia–Japan Relations in the Era of the Anglo–Japanese Alliance, 1896–1911’, PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 1984, p. 7.
- 28 A. T. Yarwood, ‘The White Australia Policy: A Re-Interpretation of its Development in the Late Colonial Period’, *Historical Studies: Australia and New Zealand*, 10 (39), November 1962.
- 29 Walker, *Anxious Nation*, ch. 6, esp. pp. 71–74. *Sydney Morning Herald* and *Age* quoted on p. 74.
- 30 The lost opportunities for trade and beneficial cultural contacts are also noted by Malcolm Booker in his political biography of Billy Hughes, *The Great Professional: A Study of W. M. Hughes*, McGraw-Hill, Sydney, 1980, p. 61.
- 31 Smith, *Australia’s Birthstain*, ch. 9, esp. p. 280. With Bill Sykes, the villain in *Oliver Twist*, Dickens ‘simultaneously personalised and stereotyped criminals transported to the colonies’. See

also John Hirst, *The Sentimental Nation: The Making of the Australian Commonwealth*, Oxford University Press, South Melbourne, 2000, p. 29.

- 32 As McQueen has pointed out in *A New Britannia* (p. 52), Tasmanians, far from Asia, were as fiercely exclusionist as any of their mainland compatriots.
- 33 Politicians such as Hughes and Deakin acknowledged this in the first decade of the Commonwealth. The insult of the White Australia policy was a national provocation which compelled Australians to defend themselves.
- 34 Bean, *In Your Hands, Australians*, p. 40. (Emphasis added—as we saw in chapter one, this particular usage of ‘own’ meant uncompromising in racial singularity.)
- 35 Barton in *CPD*, 7 August 1901, p. 3503. Barton described Pearson as ‘the most intellectual statesman who ever lived in this country’.
- 36 The global context for fear of miscegenation is discussed in Marilyn Lake & Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men’s Countries and the International Challenge to Racial Equality*, Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- 37 Alfred Deakin, *Federated Australia: Selections from Letters to the Morning Post 1900–1910* (edited by J. A. La Nauze), Melbourne University Press, 1968, pp. 80–81. La Nauze, Deakin’s first full biographer, makes the point that reading these anonymous missives is a tricky business, for Deakin sometimes expressed his own views but could change point of view in the course of a letter ‘to that of a neutral reporter and again that of a critic’. The context for the term ‘the unclean thing’ appears, here, to be his view of popular opinion. Otherwise it might be his opinion disguised as popular opinion.
- 38 O’Dowd’s mistress, Marie Pitt, shared Bernard’s passion for this ‘chosen race’. She wanted severe penalties for white Australians who had sexual relations with Chinese. First offenders were to be deprived of their citizenship and second offenders to be deported to China. Her demands are set out in ‘The National Yellow Streak’, *Labor Call*, 1 September 1910. *Labor Call* was the newspaper of the Victorian Labor Party.

Chapter 3: The Declaration of White Australia

- 1 Olive Checkland, *Britain’s Encounter with Meiji Japan, 1868–1912*, Macmillan, London, 1989, p. 57. See also Walker, *Anxious Nation*, chs 6, 17. And David Walker, ‘Rising Suns’, in Walker & Sobocinska (eds), *Australia’s Asia*, pp. 73–94.
- 2 Going onto the gold standard stabilised the currency, allowing Japan to tap into international capital markets and the growing share of global trade centred on the standard.
- 3 The strategic dimensions of the anti-Russian motivation behind the alliance is usefully discussed in G. D. Clayton, *Britain and the Eastern Question: Missolonghi to Gallipoli*, London History Studies no. 8, University of London Press, 1971, pp. 192–95. Writing in 1935, the historian Stephen H. Roberts noted the tremendous significance of the alliance for Japan: ‘It is difficult to conceive what a diplomatic sensation this Anglo–Japanese Alliance caused. It placed the seal on Japanese modernization; it admitted her to the ranks of the Great Powers; it brought her within the orbit of the western world. It also assured her of having only one enemy in case of the inevitable war with Russia.’ Stephen H. Roberts, ‘History of Contacts between the Orient and Australia’, in I. Clunies Ross (ed.), *Australia and the Far East: Diplomatic and Trade Relations*, Angus & Robertson in conjunction with the Australian Institute of International Affairs (New South Wales Branch), Sydney, 1936, p. 25.
- 4 Chamberlain’s position is discussed at length in the Immigration Restriction Bill, Second Reading, the discussion led by Deakin. See *CPD*, 12 September 1901, pp. 4802–11, *passim*.

- 5 The Japanese minister in London urged his British counterparts to pressure the Australian parliament to modify the immigration bill in Japan's favour, to no avail. See Ian Nish, 'Australia and the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, 1901-1911', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, vol. 9, no. 2, November 1963, esp. pp. 201-12. See also Meaney, *The Search for Security in the Pacific, 1901-14*, p. 108. Hayashi was a distinguished career diplomat with previous posts in China and Russia. He was elevated to the title of baron (*danshaku*) in 1895.
- 6 H. Eitaki to Barton, 3 May 1901. Quoted in Takeda, 'Australia-Japan Relations in the Era of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, 1896-1911', p. 48. The Commonwealth parliament was well aware of Eitaki's attention, as Richard Crouch noted: 'The Attorney-General himself admitted that it is against the Japanese that this measure is primarily aimed. We know very well that Mr. Eitaki, the consul for Japan, is reading very carefully our debates upon this Bill. He has been interviewed upon the matter, and declares that if the European language test is insisted upon the Japanese will refuse to accept it.' Crouch in *CPD*, 20 September 1901, pp. 5072.
- 7 Deakin in *CPD*, 12 September 1901, p. 4805. The bill was to be complemented by another—the Pacific Islands Labourers Act, which required Pacific Islanders or Kanakas to depart Queensland plantations and leave the country. They were so inferior in 'human mental stature', according to Barton, that there could be no reconciliation with them. But some support for this bill sprang from a liberal-democratic temper, from a desire for the repatriation of the Pacific Islanders to prevent their further exploitation and end what some saw as slavery.
- 8 McQueen calls it 'colonial suspicions regarding the sincerity of British race patriotism'. See *A New Britannia*, p. 26. It was a fear that British priorities might, in a time of crisis, favour the needs of the 'Hindoos' or the Japanese ahead of the security of Australia.
- 9 Barton in *CPD*, 7 August 1901, p. 3503.
- 10 Deakin in *CPD*, 12 September 1901, p. 4804. Deakin is drawing on Pearson here, as quoted earlier.
- 11 Deakin in *CPD*, 12 September 1901, pp. 4812, 4816.
- 12 Watson in *CPD*, 6 September 1901, p. 4633. His amendment was seconded by the conservative free-trader Sir William McMillan, Member for Wentworth, indicating the spread of feeling on this aspect of the bill.
- 13 On the fears associated with the top of Australia see Walker, *Anxious Nation*, ch. 9: 'Beware the Empty North'. Hughes had invoked similar fears of Queensland in the New South Wales Legislative Assembly on 24 March 1899. 'What is the good of that [a federated white Australia] when on our northern border we have the breeding ground for coloured Asiatics, where they will soon be eating the heart's blood out of the white population, where they will multiply and pass over our border in a mighty Niagara, sowing seeds of diseases which will never be eradicated, and which will permanently undermine the constitutional vigour of which the Anglo-Saxon race is so proud.' *New South Wales Parliamentary Debates*, 21 March 1899, p. 751. Cited in Booker, *The Great Professional*, p. 62.
- 14 Watson in *CPD*, 6 September 1901, p. 4633. Also, Lake & Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, pp. 152-53. The November 1901 issue of the *Bulletin* seems to have taken its cue from Watson: 'The objection to coloured immigrants is racial and economic, an objection founded on the fact that we cannot eat with them, work with them, marry with them, without the certainty of national deterioration and degradation.'
- 15 Ronald in *CPD*, 6 September 1901, p. 4665.
- 16 Page in *CPD*, 6 September 1901, p. 4649. He was one of the earliest voices in the Commonwealth parliament to ring the alarm on the threat of Japan: 'Australia is now coveted by the overcrowded races of the East. The Japanese are equal to any white race on sea or land.' *CPD*, 25 November 1904, p. 7498.

- 17 Deakin in *CPD*, 9 October 1901, p. 5819. Judith Brett writes of the ‘inherent contradiction’ in Deakin’s liberal values of liberty and nationalism. She finds this contradiction in one of Deakin’s prayers. His prayer would be ‘wide as thy Universe... it would embrace all living things’, ‘were not this to render it pointless and featureless’, and so he narrows his focus ‘to my race, to my nation, to my blood, and to myself, last and least’. *The Enigmatic Mr Deakin*, Text Publishing, Melbourne, 2017, p. 232.
- 18 For Deakin’s earlier writings on India, his fascination with India and the interconnections between this fascination and white Australia, see Ipsita Sengupta, ‘Entangled: Deakin in India’, in Walker & Sobocinska (eds), *Australia’s Asia*, pp. 50–72; also, Walker, *Anxious Nation*, pp. 20–22. In Deakin’s *Temple and Tomb in India* (1893), he affirms J. S. Mill’s dictum that ‘despotism is a legitimate mode of government in dealing with barbarians, provided the end be their improvement.’ In his long chapter on the mutiny of 1857 he celebrates the heroism of the ‘inexorable whites’ and endorses a subjugated India that must be ruled by a ‘supremacy of arms’.
- 19 Deakin in *Morning Post*, 24 September, 9 October 1901, in Alfred Deakin, *Federated Australia*, pp. 77–78.
- 20 Deakin in *CPD*, 17 March 1904, pp. 718–19. Deakin went on to say: ‘The Empire is great because it is British, and the stronger and more numerous our Britons, the stronger the Empire must become.’
- 21 In one of his *Morning Post* letters at this time, Deakin reiterated the view that Australia’s future hinged on racial exclusiveness. He expressed a ‘boundless confidence’ in the British people ‘whether at home or transplanted to this strange soil, and in their capacity to solve all difficulties if only they can be kept free from admixture with other races’. See *Morning Post*, 8 October, 12 November 1901, in Deakin, *Federated Australia*, pp. 80–81. La Nauze cited both the date of writing and the publication date, respectively. On the connection between liberalism, territorial expansion and the subjugation of ‘coloured peoples’, see Pankaj Mishra, ‘Bland Fanatics’, in *London Review of Books*, 3 December 2015, pp. 37–40. Elsewhere Mishra formulates the point in terms of political economy: ‘the processes of capital accumulation and racial domination had become inseparable early in the history of the modern world.’ See ‘Why Do White People Like What I Write?’, *London Review of Books*, 22 February 2018, pp. 17–20.
- 22 Hopetoun quoted in Takeda, ‘Australia–Japan Relations in the Era of the Anglo–Japanese Alliance, 1896–1911’, p. 59. He was presumably referring to the men and women of Australia. For a partial exploration of this theme see Jane Carey, ‘White Anxieties and the Articulation of Race: The Women’s Movement and the Making of White Australia, 1910–1930s’, in Jane Carey & Claire McLisky (eds), *Creating White Australia*, Sydney University Press, 2009. Carey’s focus is the National Council of Women which, she argues, was happy to leave the policing of ‘coloured’ exclusion to the politicians, while campaigning to ensure that white immigrants were vetted for good health and character. The objective was the breeding of a healthy, virtuous, clean-living white race. These eugenic preoccupations are pursued in more detail in Deana Heath, *Purifying Empire: Obscenity and the Politics of Moral Regulation in Britain, India and Australia*, Cambridge University Press, 2010, esp. pp. 107–113.
- 23 Deakin in *CPD*, 12 September 1901, pp. 4804–18. The Labor newspaper the *Tocsin* stressed how racial prejudice went deeper than colour: ‘We do not object to a man because his complexion and the cast of his eyes differs from our own, but because his complexion and the cast of his eyes are inseparably connected in our experience with certain qualities of mind to which we most emphatically object.’ (*Tocsin*, 4 October 1906.)
- 24 Smith in *CPD*, 25 September 1901, pp. 5153–65. Religion’s modest part in the establishment of white Australia is discussed in Hilary M. Carey, ‘Australian Religious Culture from Federation to the New Pluralism’, in Laksiri Jayasuriya, David Walker & Jan Gothard (eds), *Legacies of White Australia: Race, Culture and Nation*, University of Western Australia Press, Crawley, 2003, pp.

70–78. On the biblical doctrine of monogenesis and common humanity, see Cannadine, *The Undivided Past*, pp. 177–78; also, Christine Bolt, *Victorian Attitudes to Race*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1971, ch. 1.

- 25 Watson in *CPD*, 6 September 1901, p. 4636.
- 26 Hughes in *CPD*, 12 September 1901, pp. 4822–23. I have quoted Hughes at length as his speech encapsulates the fundamental dilemma facing Australia’s leaders not just in 1901 but onwards to the war, through the war and thereafter. On the influence of American racial animosities on the Commonwealth parliament in 1901, see Lake & Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, ch. 6: ‘White Australia Points the Way’. The American example strengthened Australia’s resolve to be racially pure.
- 27 Labor’s amendment proposed a bill that explicitly nominated the races to be excluded: ‘namely, any person who is an aboriginal, native of Asia, Africa, or of the islands thereof’. (*CPD*, 26 September 1901, p. 5221.)
- 28 Deakin’s biographer John La Nauze emphasised the desire to assist Britain in her time of need. He thought it was ‘less to avoid offence to Asians than to avoid embarrassment to Britain’. He also noted that, as leader of the House, Deakin made the final plea and may have been responsible for tipping the vote against Watson’s amendment, for the narrow win in favour of the language test. (*Alfred Deakin*, pp. 283, 281.)
- 29 Hume Cook in *CPD*, 6 September 1901, pp. 4639–40; Glynn in *CPD*, 6 September 1901, p. 4643; Wilks in *CPD*, 9 October 1901, p. 5801.
- 30 Higgins expressed views inspired by a liberal-democratic temper: a concern, for instance, about the mistreatment of racial minorities and the exploitation of coloured labour. But, like Pearson, he spoke of ‘superior’ and ‘inferior’ races, and his case against race mixture could, on occasion, sink to crude racial metaphor: ‘if one rotten apple were placed in a bag with three good apples,’ he told a North Melbourne audience, ‘the bad apple did not become good; all three went bad.’ *Argus*, 12 March 1901. Quoted in John Rickard, *H. B. Higgins: The Rebel as Judge*, George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1984, p. 132.
- 31 Higgins in *CPD*, 20 September 1901, pp. 5078, 5074; for the ‘schoolboys’ comment, see *CPD*, 6 September 1901, pp. 4655–56. See also Marilyn Lake, ‘On Being a White Man, Australia, Circa 1900’, in Hsu-Ming Teo & Richard White (eds), *Cultural History in Australia*, UNSW Press, 2003, pp. 107–08. Lake’s summary of the Australian objections to cloaking their racial objective in a language test is eloquent and accurate: ‘a combination of outrage at imperial dictation, indignation that they could not state their racist intentions outright, ironic comment on British unmanliness and hurt that the Colonial Office seemed to pay more heed to the sensibilities of the Japanese and “Hindoo Rajahs” than to democratic white men’. David Walker discusses ‘defiant masculinity’ in response to the fear of Asia in ‘Shooting Mabel: Warrior Masculinity and Asian Invasion’.
- 32 McMillan in *CPD*, 6 September 1901, p. 4625.
- 33 Ronald in *CPD*, 6 September 1901, p. 4664. He had formerly claimed the Chinese ‘should be poll-axed or poll-taxed in such a manner as would make the country too hot for them’.
- 34 Crouch in *CPD*, 20 September 1901, p. 5073.
- 35 Deakin in *CPD*, 9 October 1901, p. 5822.

Chapter 4: The Sentinel

- 1 They shared with British imperialists, and with the likes of Deakin, a belief in the interdependence of the liberal project at home and colonialism abroad.

- 2 Meaney, *The Search for Security in the Pacific, 1901–14*, pp. 110–12, 114; Brett, *The Enigmatic Mr Deakin*, ch. 23.
- 3 Nish, 'Australia and the Anglo–Japanese Alliance, 1901–1911', p. 204.
- 4 Meaney, *The Search for Security in the Pacific, 1901–14*, pp. 116–17. The importance of the treaty did not escape Bertrand Russell, who was 'glad England should be ready to recognize the yellow man as a civilized being, and not wholly sorry at the quarrel with Australia which this recognition entails'. (Quoted in McQueen, *A New Britannia*, p. 74.)
- 5 The term 'honorary Anglo-Saxons' was coined by Theodore Roosevelt.
- 6 The close relationship between Britain and Japan in matters of shipping, armaments and wireless equipment are canvassed in John W. M. Chapman, 'Admiral Sir John Fisher (1841–1920) and Japan, 1894–1904', in Hugh Cortazzi (ed.), *Britain and Japan: Biographical Portraits*, vol. 5, Global Oriental, Farnham, Kent, 2005, pp. 174–85.
- 7 *Sydney Mail*, 10 June 1903. The summary here is based on the vivid description of the Japanese squadron's visit in David Walker, *Anxious Nation*, pp. 85–86.
- 8 The first Australian novel to feature Japanese invaders appeared soon after the squadron's visit. *The Coloured Conquest* was published late in 1903. It is narrated by the last free white male in Australia. The rest are captive, and the most attractive of the white women are selected for breeding with Japanese to produce a new Eurasian race. Walker, 'Rising Suns', in Walker and Sobocinska (eds), *Australia's Asia*, pp. 81–82.
- 9 In 1898 the United States had annexed Hawaii, and wrested the Philippines and Cuba from Spain; the European powers were jockeying for advantage in China; Germany, having cheered on the Afrikaners, was active in the West Pacific, acquiring the Caroline Islands in 1898; and a mighty Russian fleet was operating in the North Pacific. Humphrey McQueen, *Japan to the Rescue: Australian Security Around the Indonesian Archipelago During the American Century*, William Heinemann Australia, Melbourne, 1991, ch. 1: 'A Web of Empires'. See also Geoffrey Bolton, *Edmund Barton: The One Man for the Job*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2000, p. 225.
- 10 '[British policy] was for over fifty years firmly wedded to the belief that Russian control of Constantinople must always be prevented. An exaggerated fear of Russia was at the root of many of Britain's decisions on the Eastern Question over the lengthy period between 1821 and 1907 [sic]...It cost the Liberal Party much heart-searching as late as 1914 to accept that Britain should fight alongside Russia and against Germany in the Great War. Yet, the British troops in Gallipoli in 1915 were fighting against Germans and Turks in part for the benefit of Russia.' (Clayton, *Britain and the Eastern Question*, p. 19.)
- 11 Letter, Barton to E. T. H. Hutton, 30 September 1903. Quoted in Meaney, *The Search for Security in the Pacific, 1901–14*, p. 117.
- 12 Bolton, *Edmund Barton*, p. 273. The revenue-poor situation was written into the constitution. The Commonwealth was required to return three-quarters of customs and excise revenue to the states for the first ten years after federation.
- 13 During his stint as commandant of the New South Wales Military Forces (1893–96), Hutton acquired the view, similar to Bean's, that the Australian was a 'born bushman' and a good fighter who would thrive 'where soldiers unaccustomed to bush life would die'. ('Hutton', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*; also *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, vol. XV, 1921–30.) The Hutton entry in the *DCB* notes: 'His vanity, passion for public speaking, scorn for civilians, disregard for democratic institutions, and lack of tact proved fatal liabilities and made him appear to be, in the estimate of one former GOC, a "dangerous martinet".'
- 14 'Military Forces of the Commonwealth—Minute upon the Defence of Australia, by Major-General Hutton', 7 April 1902, in 'Colonial Conference, 1902: Papers Relating to a Conference Between the Secretary of State for the Colonies and the Prime Ministers of Self-Governing

Colonies' (Melbourne, 1903), pp. 45–54. Copy in National Archives, 'Major-Gen. Sir Edward Hutton's scheme for the reorganisation of the military forces', NAA: B168, 1902/2688. Quoted in Meaney, *Search for Security in the Pacific, 1901–14*, p. 61. The military historian Jeffrey Grey suggests: 'Hutton's argument that the field force was to be used for the defence of Australia's interests was almost certainly duplicitous.' He describes the distinguishing feature of Hutton's service as 'an inability, or disinclination, to see as his first duty an obligation to the defence minister of the colonial government whose forces he commanded'. *A Military History of Australia*, Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 70.

15 La Nauze, *Alfred Deakin*, pp. 531–52.

16 Quoted in Meaney, *The Search for Security in the Pacific, 1901–14*, p. 62.

17 Hopetoun quoted in Bolton, *Edmund Barton*, p. 268.

18 Fitzhardinge, *The Fiery Particle*, pp. 142–44. Barton got no concessions on the regional mobility of the squadron but he did manage to persuade the Admiralty to provide vessels for the training of a local navy reserve. Neither Barton nor Forrest took up the nationalist line of argument. Forrest believed that an Australian navy would be impossibly costly and of doubtful value, and Barton wagered his government on the agreement once home—he made the vote in the House a matter of confidence. Deakin's account of his government's position, in his anonymous column in the *Morning Post*, defended the government decision on cost grounds but also put the nationalist case sympathetically. (La Nauze, *Alfred Deakin*, pp. 516–17.)

19 Meaney, *The Search for Security in the Pacific, 1901–14*, pp. 65, 67.

20 'Defence Act', in Peter Dennis et al. (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Australian Military History*, pp. 208–09. The act was proclaimed in March 1904 in the tenure of Deakin's prime ministership of September 1903 – April 1904. Hutton's preference for a permanent officer class over the citizen soldier did not prevail.

21 Meaney, *The Search for Security in the Pacific, 1901–14*, pp. 69–70. Hamilton had been Kitchener's chief of staff in the South African war. See 'Hamilton' in *The Oxford Companion to Australian Military History*, pp. 284–85.

22 Booker, *The Great Professional*, ch. 5.

23 Hughes in *CPD*, 31 July 1901, p. 3292.

24 Fitzhardinge, *The Fiery Particle*, p. 140.

25 Hughes in *CPD*, 31 July 1901, pp. 3293, 3294. He wanted defence shared out, democratic. He thought obedience 'a primary virtue', military training good for a man's character. He thought his scheme could well save the nation in time of peril. But the parliament at this time was not to be persuaded away from the naval agreement, nor was it ready to consider the mighty challenge of inaugurating a navy or organising the nation's manhood into citizens' regiments. With no clear and present danger, his colleagues in the parliament were unable to share Hughes's sense of urgency.

26 Hughes in *CPD*, 21 July 1903, pp. 2315, 2318, 2319. The politics of biography can be fascinating: while Fitzhardinge quotes liberally from this speech, he makes no mention of Hughes's elaborate critique of British imperialism, thus considerably distorting the thread and power of Hughes's argument.

Chapter 5: The Perfect Storm

1 *Evening News*, 17 June 1905.

2 On the renewal of the Anglo–Japanese alliance see Nish, 'Australia and the Anglo–Japanese Alliance, 1901–1911', pp. 204–07. The second alliance was announced to the world on 27 September 1905.

- 3 Meaney, *The Search for Security in the Pacific, 1901–14*, ch. 5.
- 4 David Cannadine's take on Japan's rise highlights the dilemma for Australia's politicians: 'Here was a country undergoing "astonishing development", and that seemed increasingly Western in its attitudes, attainments, and ambitions; yet the people of Japan had "yellow" skin and did not fit on either side of the alleged white–black racial divide.' Worst of all, the British government appeared certain the Japanese did not belong with the lesser races. The French government, at least in 1902, was not so sure. In that year it wrote to the British Foreign Office to enquire whether the Japanese should be characterised as white or non-white. See *The Undivided Past*, p. 208.
- 5 Deakin in Melbourne *Herald*, 12 June 1905. His response to the Japanese victory may have been shored up by Hutton's convictions, firmly expressed in 1904, that Japan's militarism had changed the Pacific scene incontrovertibly and Australia, now, could be invaded. See D. C. S. Sissons, 'Attitudes to Japan and Defence, 1890–1923', MA thesis, University of Melbourne, 1956, pp. 33–34. Sissons' thesis has been digitised and can be downloaded from the University of Melbourne Library Catalogue: minerva-access.unimelb.edu.au/handle/11343/38791
- 6 McLean in Melbourne *Herald*, 13 June 1905. He was a minister and deputy leader in George Reid's free-trade government following the defeat of the Deakin and Watson governments. See also La Nauze, *Alfred Deakin*, pp. 517–18.
- 7 *Official Report of the Commonwealth Political Labour Conference, Melbourne*, July 1905, pp. 8–12, 15–16.
- 8 Pearce in *CPD*, 22 November 1905, p. 5346.
- 9 The National Defence League's first president was the chancellor of the University of Sydney, Sir Normand Maclaurin. At a meeting of citizens at the Australia Hotel in Sydney, Maclaurin emphasised the new situation: 'In former years Australia was looked upon as being isolated from the rest of the world...Recent events, however, have shown that nothing of the kind could be seriously believed. We know not when the din of battle and the clash of arms just ceased in the East, would be at our doors. We can no longer trust to any system that would be short of a perfect defence.' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 September 1905.
- 10 Opinion in the parliament at this time is surveyed by Sissons, 'Attitudes to Japan and Defence, 1890–1923', pp. 25–30.
- 11 Lake & Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, pp. 161–62. In return, the Japanese government agreed to prevent their people settling in Australia.
- 12 John Connor, *Anzac and Empire: George Foster Pearce and the Foundations of Australian Defence*, Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 15. Senator Pulsford's pamphlet, 'The British Empire and the Relations of Asia and Australasia', was a rare intervention and ran counter to the invasion pamphlet tradition. See also Rees, *Bearing Witness*, pp. 39–40. Pulsford did not favour the free admission of all races into Australia but he remained one of the few to oppose white Australia, considering the education test 'brutal'. He believed that the British empire was a great Asiatic power and therefore Australian interests were 'enveloped' with those of millions of Asians. See 'Edward Pulsford' in *The Biographical Dictionary of the Australian Senate*, vol. 1, Melbourne University Press, 2000, pp. 31–34.
- 13 Lake & Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, pp. 166–89. Gandhi is quoted on p. 168.
- 14 Lake & Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, ch. 7, esp. pp. 177–84. European tyrannies in the 'outside world' are explored in V. G. Kiernan's path-breaking *The Lords of Human Kind: European Attitudes to the Outside World in the Imperialist Age* (1969). This study inspired an international literature attentive to both sides of the 'equation'. Kiernan's work contains many melancholy themes, including the contrast between liberty at home and tyrannical oppression abroad. The Palestinian intellectual Edward Said said *The Lords of Human Kind* was a major

influence in the shaping of his classic *Orientalism* (1978). See John Trumbour, 'V. G. Kiernan: Historian of Human Kind', *Nation*, 2 March 2009.

- 15 Meaney, *The Search for Security in the Pacific, 1901–14*, pp. 129–30. A. J. Balfour probably had Canada in mind when he referred to 'Australia and other colonies'. Balfour was prime minister of the United Kingdom, 1902–05, and foreign secretary, 1916–19.
- 16 The Opposition was supportive, Joseph Cook declaring that the nation must be careful not to 'affront' the Japanese: 'We cannot, ostrich-like, hide our head in the sand, in the hope that no outside invader will ever attack us...it is time for us to inquire if our relations with it [Japan] are such as to be likely to provoke reprisals.' Cook in *CPD*, 6 December 1905, p. 6308.
- 17 Letter, Elgin to Northcote, 12 April 1906. Quoted in Meaney, *The Search for Security in the Pacific, 1901–14*, p. 131.
- 18 H. B. Lucas (Colonial Office), 19 March 1906. Quoted in Meaney, *The Search for Security in the Pacific, 1901–14*, p. 103.
- 19 *Morning Post*, 19 July 1906.
- 20 La Nauze, *Alfred Deakin*, p. 484. Prior to La Nauze, Walter Murdoch published a short account of Deakin's life, *Alfred Deakin: A Sketch*, Constable, London, 1923.
- 21 Leaving Great Britain to police the high seas and keep the sea lanes open.
- 22 Deakin called the committee 'the highest authority in the Empire'.
- 23 La Nauze, *Alfred Deakin*, p. 523. For Creswell see 'Creswell, Vice-Admiral William Rooke', in *The Oxford Companion to Australian Military History*, pp. 186–88.
- 24 *Morning Post*, 20 August, 6 October 1906, in La Nauze (ed.), *Federated Australia*, p. 192. For Deakin to Jebb, 23 July 1906, see La Nauze, *Alfred Deakin*, p. 523. See also Brett, *The Enigmatic Mr Deakin*, p. 351.
- 25 Deakin's liberal protectionists lost nine seats, and came in third behind the free-trade anti-socialists and the Labor Party. Watson informed Deakin that Labor was not anxious for office in the form of minority government and Deakin, therefore, remained prime minister with Labor support. That solved, the two leaders went off to their summer holidays, Watson to the Blue Mountains and Deakin to Point Lonsdale on the Bellarine Peninsula, Victoria. See Brett, *The Enigmatic Mr Deakin*, p. 344. See also John Hirst, 'Nation Building, 1901–14', in Alison Bashford & Stuart Macintyre (eds), *Cambridge History of Australia*, Cambridge University Press, 2016, pp. 29–30.
- 26 Deakin in *CPD*, 26 September 1906, pp. 5577.
- 27 As of 1907 the Colonial Conference was titled the Imperial Conference.
- 28 Cook in *CPD*, 4 July 1907, p. 99. Cook was still a keen naval-subsidy man who spoke of Deakin's imagined navy as a 'mosquito fleet'. But he was equally fervent about the need to adequately fund the nation's defence.
- 29 Cameron in *CPD* (Senate), 20 February 1907, p. 12.
- 30 Lake & Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, pp. 194–95. See also La Nauze, *Alfred Deakin*, p. 500.
- 31 Brett, *The Enigmatic Mr Deakin*, p. 355.
- 32 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 June 1907.
- 33 Hughes in *CPD*, 1 August 1907, pp. 1282–83; also pp. 1289–90. Men who had formerly declared Hughes's proposals to be extravagant now fell into line. One of these was Thomas Ewing, a Deakin ally, who told the Parliament: 'Every sane man in Australia knows that, if this country is to remain the hope of the white man, it must be held, not only by the power of Australia alone, but by the might of the white man in all parts of the world...We must seek to knit together the white

man of this and other lands in preparation for that last deadly conflict which will assuredly come upon Australia.' Ewing in *CPD*, 22 August 1907, p. 2239.

- 34 For Hughes, Asia was a nightmare. For Deakin, its history and colour, in India at least, provided an entry point into a contemplative world of the imagination where he could indulge his intellectual and sensual impulses while simultaneously remaining committed to the High Imperialism of colonial rule, by means of force, 'the supremacy of arms', where necessary. See, for instance, his *Temple and Tomb in India*, Melville, Mullen and Slade, Melbourne, 1893.
- 35 'Over the course of 1907 discussions with the British government about an Australian navy had made no progress. Deakin was impatient to begin legislating his defence scheme, but he needed Britain's approval, as well as support from the public and the parliament.' Brett, *The Enigmatic Mr Deakin*, p. 365.
- 36 Deakin in *CPD*, 13 December 1907, p. 7509 ff. La Nauze describes the speech as 'a luminous survey of the history and present problems of Australia's naval defence'. (*Alfred Deakin*, p. 527.)
- 37 Letter, Pearce to Deakin, undated, c. 25 December 1907. Quoted in Meaney, *The Search for Security in the Pacific, 1901–14*, p. 154.
- 38 Lord Elgin was annoyed at the impropriety of the invitation without notice to Britain and without British permission. 'It is useless to explain to Mr. Deakin,' he wrote in April 1908. Elgin quoted in Marilyn Lake, 'Monuments of Manhood and Colonial Dependence: The Cult of Anzac as Compensation', in Lake (ed.), *Memory, Monuments and Museums*, Melbourne University Press, 2006, p. 46.
- 39 Deakin to Bray, 24 December 1907; Deakin to Whitelaw Reid, 7 January 1908. Quoted in Meaney, *The Search for Security in the Pacific, 1901–14*, p. 164. See also Lake & Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, p. 197. David Walker observes, 'the Colonial Office did not want anti-Japanese sentiment in Australia interfering with their alliance with Japan...The fleet visit might occasion passionate displays of racial unity' that would offend the Japanese. (*Anxious Nation*, pp. 93–94.)
- 40 Walker, *Anxious Nation*, pp. 94–95. Brett's account is also vivid: *The Enigmatic Mr Deakin*, p. 369. Elsewhere Walker provides insights into the gendered reading of the public enthusiasm for the Japanese visitors. He notes the *Bulletin's* critique of this public enthusiasm, the reckoning that Australia had been feminised, the response revealing the typically feminine traits of 'fickleness, inconstancy, absence of thought and logic and incapacity to reason'. See Walker, 'Rising Suns' in Walker & Sobocinska (eds), *Australia's Asia*, pp. 83–84.
- 41 *West Australian*, 21 August 1908.
- 42 *Courier*, 28 August 1908. The press response, at least in the major dailies, is discussed in Sissons, 'Attitudes to Japan and Defence, 1890–1923', pp. 61–65.
- 43 Alfred Deakin to Richard Jebb, undated, sometime after 18 September 1908. Quoted in Brett, *The Enigmatic Mr Deakin*, p. 368.
- 44 Quoted in Walker, *Anxious Nation*, p. 95.
- 45 Several more race-focussed poems that figured in this outpouring are quoted in Meaney's *The Search for Security in the Pacific, 1901–14* (pp. 168–69), including the C. E. W. Bean verse cited in chapter one.
- 46 *Age*, 27 August 1908.
- 47 Walker, *Anxious Nation*, pp. 120–21. The urgent imaginings of this period are also discussed, with respect to Japan, in Peter Stanley, *Invading Australia: Japan and the Battle for Australia, 1942*, Viking Penguin, Melbourne, 2008, pp. 76–91 (ebook).
- 48 Ewing in *CPD*, 29 September 1908, p. 454. The Labor Party was supportive, including compulsory military training in its platform. Two months before Ewing's speech, Watson had declared the Japanese 'a people who were clever and warlike and who were not governed by

altruistic purposes'. Fourth Commonwealth Political Labor Conference, Brisbane, Official Report, p. 16. Cited in Sissons, p. 54.

- 49 McDougall in *CPD*, 30 September 1908, p. 541. Deakin's reply in the House was brief: 'There will soon be an opportunity of discussing our recent correspondence with the Admiralty. I will invite the honourable member to defer his questions until then.' Walker notes that critics who made the same point would sometimes observe that Britain was also, in large part, responsible for the destabilisation of China. See *Anxious Nation*, p. 39.

Chapter 6: The Fate of the Peruvians

- 1 Tariff protection became the New Protection, a system that gave tariff cover only to employers who provided fair and reasonable wages to their employees. See Brett, *The Enigmatic Mr Deakin*, pp. 360–61; also, Hirst, 'Nation Building, 1901–14', pp. 28–31. The New Protection is a striking manifestation of the high ideals discussed in chapter three in association with the racial exclusiveness of white Australia.
- 2 *Morning Post*, 16 November 1908. Deakin quoted in Brett, *The Enigmatic Mr Deakin*, p. 372.
- 3 Fisher in *CPD*, 17 September 1908, p. 131. His emphatic view expressed as follows: 'The honourable member is placing an utterly wrong complexion upon our advocacy of the policy. The least of the reasons that we advanced in opposition to the employment of coloured labour was its effect on industrial conditions. We pointed out that the real danger which it involved was the racial one.' Fisher was a coalminer by trade and, like Pearce and Hughes, had come to politics through his part in union organisation. And, like Pearce, he was a convert from utopian socialism to 'democratic militarism', to the hard realities of the Japanese pre-eminence in the Pacific.
- 4 Peter Bastian, *Andrew Fisher*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2009, pp. 193–99.
- 5 Douglas Newton, *Hell-Bent: Australia's Leap into the Great War*, Scribe, Melbourne, 2014, pp. 26–27.
- 6 Pearce in *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 April 1909. A few weeks later Pearce spoke of Australia's peril in his 'Eight Hours Address' to a gathering at Horsham: 'That we were of superior civilization was no guarantee that we should not come down before an inferior civilization as other powers had done. The pages of history were full of instances where a superior race had been swept out of existence and buried in oblivion by barbarian hordes... We should not be safe until we had twenty million standing behind the guns.' *Argus*, 26 April 1909.
- 7 Quoted in Brett, *The Enigmatic Mr Deakin*, p. 380. Hirst suggested what pushed the two non-Labor parties together was 'Labor's relentless rise'. 'Nation Building, 1901–14', p. 35.
- 8 Hughes in *CPD*, 27 May 1909, p. 132–33.
- 9 La Nauze, *Alfred Deakin*, p. 581.
- 10 See Nicholas Lambert, 'Sir John Fisher, the Fleet Unit Concept, and the Creation of the Royal Australian Navy', in David Stevens and John Reeves (eds), *Southern Trident: Strategy, History and the Rise of Australian Naval Power*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2001, pp. 214–24.
- 11 McQueen, *A New Britannia*, pp. 97–98. The British unit was to be a refurbished squadron stationed in the East Indies. For the Foxton quote see Meaney, *The Search for Security in the Pacific, 1901–14*, p. 183.
- 12 Foxton quoted in Newton, *Hell-Bent*, p. 27.
- 13 Cook in *CPD*, 21 September 1909, pp. 3614, 3615, 3624. See also John Mordike, *An Army for a Nation: A History of Australian Military Developments, 1880–1914*, Allen & Unwin with Directorate of Army Studies, Department of Defence, Sydney, 1992, pp. 218–24.
- 14 Hughes in *CPD*, 13 October 1909, pp. 4472–73.

- 15 Deakin in *CPD*, 15 October 1909, p. 4629.
- 16 R. B. Haldane in the *Age*, 25 September 1909, p. 10. Quoted in Mordike, *An Army for a Nation*, pp. 223–24. On the tensions in British Edwardian liberalism and the ascent of the ‘Liberal Imperialists’, including Asquith, Grey and Haldane, see Douglas Newton, “‘A Real Heritage of the English People’: British Liberalism and ‘Continental Despotism’”, in Robin Archer, Joy Damousi, Murray Goot & Sean Scalmer (eds), *The Conscription Conflict and the Great War*, Monash University Publishing, Clayton, 2016.
- 17 *Age*, 11 February 1910. Quoted in Mordike, *An Army for a Nation*, p. 226.
- 18 John Mordike, *An Army for a Nation*, pp. 228–33. For the report see *Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers*, 1910 Session, vol. II, no. 8, ‘Defence of Australia—Memorandum by Field Marshall Viscount Kitchener of Khartoum’. Mordike refers to Bridges as ‘an agent for the imperial cause in Australia’ (p. 231); Deakin viewed him as being ‘imperfectly in sympathy’ with certain nationalist aims (‘Bridges, William Throsby’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*).
- 19 George Foster Pearce, *Carpenter to Cabinet*, Hutchinson, London, 1951, pp. 71–72. As Mordike expressed it, in ‘*We Should Do This Thing Quietly*’: *Japan and the Great Deception in Australian Defence Policy 1911–1914*, Aerospace Centre, Fairbairn, ACT, 2002, ‘he too had become committed to imperial defence objectives.’ (p. 31.) See also Mordike, *An Army for a Nation*, p. 234.
- 20 Bastian, *Andrew Fisher*, pp. 196–97. The funds were to come from revenue rather than from the London money market, to maximise self-governing autonomy in this sphere.
- 21 McQueen points out that ‘universal military suffrage’ was an opportunity for ‘all men to share in the fighting’ and, as such, ‘the companion to universal suffrage’ (*A New Britannia*, pp. 80–81).
- 22 Almost half a century later Judith Wright’s massacre poem ‘Nigger’s Leap’ was misread as a declaration that ‘we should have known’ about such terrible doings; whereas, on a careful reading, it is saying we should have known the lesson of *their* fate so it does not become ours: ‘We should have known / The night that tided up the cliffs and hid them / had the same question on its tongue for us / And there they lie that were ourselves writ strange.’ See Georgina Arnott, *The Unknown Judith Wright*, UWA Publishing, Crawley, 2016, pp. 162–63.
- 23 Pearce in *CPD* (Senate), 18 August 1910, pp. 1670–72.

Chapter 7: ‘Willy Nilly’

- 1 Patrick McMahon Glynn, attorney-general in the Deakin–Cook (Fusion) government, in *CPD*, 25 November 1910, p. 6864. For Hughes, see *CPD*, 16 November 1910, p. 6250.
- 2 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 January 1911. For the ‘Oriental linking’ quotation see the editorial page of the previous day.
- 3 In the Commonwealth parliament, radical Labor men declared themselves suspicious of or hostile to empire, fearful of betrayal or abandonment by Britain in time of war and conscious of the menace in the Pacific—Japan. See speeches by Senator James Stewart in *CPD*, 3 November 1910, p. 5587, and Senator Arthur Rae in *CPD*, 3 November 1911, p. 5590. ‘I cannot understand,’ said Rae, ‘the talk about establishing a naval unit which, in time of danger, is to be sent to the other side of the world, when, as Senator Stewart has said, we should most need it here. Our danger is from Japan, or an awakened China, and not from any of the Great European powers.’
- 4 Sissons, ‘Attitudes to Japan and Defence, 1890–1923’, pp. 68–75.
- 5 Rear-Admiral Sir Charles Ottley to Sir Arthur Nicolson, 15 January 1911. Quoted in Nish, ‘Australia and the Anglo–Japanese Alliance, 1901–1911’, p. 208. Nicolson was permanent under-secretary of state for foreign affairs; Ottley was secretary to the peak defence-strategy committee, the Committee of Imperial Defence.

- 6 Sir Arthur Nicolson to Ottley, 18 January 1911. Quoted in Nish, 'Australia and the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, 1901–1911', p. 209.
- 7 Grey quoted in Nish, 'Australia and the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, 1901–1911', p. 209. A related concern was the theoretical possibility that a Dominion might choose to remain neutral in the event of war. This was considered a subject best not broached. The CID decided to let sleeping dogs lie and 'to accept the technical "fiction" implied in the idea that the Dominions acted of their own free will in waging war'. (Quoted in Newton, *Hell-Bent*, p. 30.)
- 8 Mordike was formerly a graduate of Duntroon Military College (Canberra) with seventeen years as an officer in the Australian Army, including a period of active service in Vietnam, and subsequently as a historian in the Army Office, Department of Defence.
- 9 The underlying theme was documented as follows: 'It is desirable from an educative point of view that the Government of the Dominions should understand to what extent the comparative immunity from the danger of attack at present enjoyed by them is due to the existence of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance and our close ties with the United States.' Quoted in Ian Nish, *Alliance in Decline: A Study of Anglo-Japanese Relations, 1908–23* (1972), Bloomsbury Academic, 2012, p. 61.
- 10 John Mordike, 'We Should Do This Thing Quietly', p. 50.
- 11 Committee paper quoted in Mordike, 'We Should Do This Thing Quietly', p. 51.
- 12 Grey quoted in Meaney, *The Search for Security in the Pacific, 1901–14*, pp. 216–17.
- 13 The overriding purpose of the 1911 negotiations was to lock in the alliance for at least ten years, but Britain also wanted an adjustment to the terms of the alliance with respect to the United States: a British–American arbitration treaty was in the making, and a clause was required in the Anglo-Japanese document exempting Britain from any obligation to pair with Japan in the event of war against the United States.
- 14 Mordike, 'We Should Do This Thing Quietly', p. 57.
- 15 Mordike, 'We Should Do This Thing Quietly', p. 66.
- 16 H. Wilson to the chief of the Imperial General Staff, 10 April 1911. Quoted in Mordike, 'We Should Do This Thing Quietly', pp. 67–68.
- 17 Mordike, 'We Should Do This Thing Quietly', p. 69.
- 18 Mordike, 'We Should Do This Thing Quietly', p. 70.
- 19 Mordike, 'We Should Do This Thing Quietly', pp. 71–79. Mordike's earlier account of the War Office meetings was published in *An Army for a Nation* (1992), pp. 238–41. The pre-eminent cultural historian in Australia–Asia relations, David Walker, endorses Mordike's findings. See 'Rising Suns', in Walker & Sobocinska (eds), *Australia's Asia*, pp. 88–89. The importance of Mordike's scholarship is also acknowledged in Douglas Newton's *Hell-Bent*, chs 2–3. For a critique of Mordike's perspective see Craig Wilcox, 'Relinquishing the Past: John Mordike's *An Army for a Nation*', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 1993, vol. 40, no. 1, pp. 52–65. Mordike's reply to Wilcox can be found in Part IV of 'We Should Do This Thing Quietly', pp. 95–139.
- 20 *The Times*, 21 June 1911. In *Hell-Bent*, Newton poses the question: 'Why were Australians so willing to contemplate wider imperial "responsibilities"?' (p. 49.) He quotes the secretary of the Commonwealth Naval Board in July 1913: 'The possibility of a war with Japan and the probable effect of such [a] war on Australia are no new factors. They have been in the mind of leading Australians since the Russo-Japanese War and possibly even before that...The pressure of the German menace upon the British Isles has emphasized the need for Australia to take stock of her whole position in the Pacific. The former position of Britannia ruling the waves has for the moment ceased to have a world-wide application.'

Chapter 8: 'No White Man Worthy of the Name'

- 1 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 January 1912.
- 2 At the Australian Workers Association conference in 1913, a motion condemning the Commonwealth's compulsory military scheme was defeated on the grounds of the danger of an Asian invasion.
- 3 In this case the crisis was resolved with France acquiring Morocco as a protectorate while Germany received territorial concessions in the French Congo. As for the rumour of a concession to Germany in the Pacific, the very idea, according to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, was 'absolutely intolerable'. *SMH*, 4 August 1911.
- 4 Britain's main concern was to protect Gibraltar and British warships' passage through the Gibraltar Straits by ensuring that the Moroccan coast was not fortified. This the French freely promised in return for British acceptance of a predominant French influence in Morocco. See Clayton, *Britain and the Eastern Question*, p. 194.
- 5 Higgs in *CPD*, 28 August 1912, pp. 2707.
- 6 Maloney in *CPD*, 28 August 1912, p. 2695. The Sydney businessman H. E. Pratten's travelogue was published about this time, wherein he declared his own anxieties about abandonment: 'The decadence of England must be serious if the Englishmen of today—the descendants of Drake and Frobisher...are transferring their heritage of the right to rule the waves to Asiatics.' *Through Orient to Occident*, Sydney, c. 1912, p. 61.
- 7 Meaney, *The Search for Security in the Pacific, 1901–14*, pp. 230–32.
- 8 *Argus*, 19 August 1912.
- 9 Newton documents the progress of the joint venture, how the planning was hurried along by the First Balkan War of October 1912, and how it evolved into plans for an expeditionary force for action abroad, notably directed at Pacific islands held by European powers; the planning, as ever, marked by secrecy due to the 'restrictive clauses' of the defence act and to popular hostility to overseas military ventures. See *Hell-Bent*, ch. 3, esp. pp. 40–44.
- 10 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 November 1912.
- 11 *Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers*, 1911, vol. II, no. 7. 'Naval Forces: Recommendations of Admiral Sir Reginald Henderson'. Bastian, *Andrew Fisher*, p. 197.
- 12 *Bulletin*, 31 October 1912. Quoted in Graham Freudenberg, *Churchill and Australia*, Macmillan, Sydney, 2008, p. 46.
- 13 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22, 25 January 1913.
- 14 Churchill in *Parliamentary Debates, Commons*, 26 March 1913, p. 1761.
- 15 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 March 1913. On the concern that Asia might 'Aboriginalise' the white people of Australia, see Walker, *Anxious Nation*, passim.
- 16 Brett, *The Enigmatic Mr Deakin*, pp. 412–13.
- 17 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 June 1913.
- 18 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 June 1913.
- 19 Meaney, *The Search for Security in the Pacific, 1901–14*, pp. 244–48.
- 20 Forrest in *CPD*, 2 October 1913, p. 1787.
- 21 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 October 1913.
- 22 Keith Murdoch quoted in Freudenberg, *Churchill and Australia*, p. 45.
- 23 Churchill in *Parliamentary Debates, Commons*, 17 March 1914, pp. 1931–35.
- 24 Massey quoted in Humphrey McQueen, *A New Britannia*, p. 75.
- 25 Melbourne *Punch*, 2 April 1914.

- 26 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 March 1914. There were also rejoinders from the informed public and scholars who monitored international affairs. Perhaps the most significant of these was F. W. Eggleston's perspective on Japan, the alliance and the necessity for a local navy in 'Naval Policy and the Pacific Question—The Australian View', *Round Table*, June 1914.
- 27 *Age*, 13 April 1914.
- 28 Letter, Pearce to Denman, 4 May 1914. Quoted in Meaney, *The Search for Security in the Pacific, 1901–14*, p. 253.
- 29 Arthur Bruce Smith in *CPD*, 22 April 1914, p. 234. On Smith see also Walker, 'Race Building and the Disciplining of White Australia', in Jayasuriya et al. (eds), *Legacies of White Australia*, pp. 34–35.
- 30 Riley in *CPD*, 23 April 1914, p. 277.
- 31 Ryrie in *CPD*, 5 May 1914, p. 554.
- 32 Mordike, 'We Should Do This Thing Quietly', pp. 90–91. Hamilton continued: 'But tell the Australian that he must contribute to a force which may have to fight outside the areas washed by the Pacific, and he at once begins to talk of tribute.'
- 33 Quoted in Walker, 'Rising Suns' in Walker & Sobocinska (eds), *Australia's Asia*, p. 89.

Chapter 9: War and Peace

- 1 L. Harcourt to R. M. Ferguson, 6 December 1914, 'Private and Personal, Very Secret'. Quoted in Fitzhardinge, *The Little Digger*, pp. 157–59.
- 2 R. M. Ferguson to L. Harcourt, 18 February 1915. Quoted in Fitzhardinge, *The Little Digger*, p. 160.
- 3 Fitzhardinge, *The Little Digger*, p. 151. See also Lake & Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, chs 11, 12.
- 4 Fisher quoted in Neville Meaney, *Australia and the World Crisis, 1914–1923. A History of Australian Defence and Foreign Policy: Volume 2*, Sydney University Press, 2009, p. 107. On the Anglo-Japanese commercial treaty of 1911 see Fitzhardinge, *The Little Digger*, p. 149.
- 5 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8, 16 June 1915.
- 6 Meaney, *Australia and the World Crisis, 1914–1923*, pp. 95–110. By mid-1915 the strategic opportunism included Japan's 'Twenty-One Demands' on China, a bullying ultimatum designed to give Japan regional ascendancy, including access to Chinese raw materials such as iron ore and the neutralising of Chinese coastal ports which might otherwise harbour hostile navies.
- 7 Nor would Australia be accepted in these inner counsels, as Newton has pointed out, while Fisher was pliant and obsequious in his dealings with London. See *Hell-Bent*, pp. 242–43.
- 8 The concerns about Japan's interest in the oil reserves of the Dutch East Indies and the related territorial demands they might make has been largely ignored by scholars in the field, with the exception of Humphrey McQueen. See *Japan to the Rescue*, pp. 26–29, 36–37. 'The gravest fear was that Japan would find a way of justifying the occupation of the Indies while Britain was bogged down in Europe and the Middle East.' McQueen also points to the assistance given by Japanese forces to the quelling of the Sepoy rebellion in Singapore in February–March 1915, another credit for the bargaining table.
- 9 R. M. Ferguson to A. Bonar Law, 22 December 1915. Quoted in Fitzhardinge, *The Little Digger*, p. 151.
- 10 See Lawson's 1895 poem 'The Star of Australasia'.
- 11 'The Day'—*And After: War Speeches of the Rt. Hon. W. M. Hughes*, arranged by Keith Murdoch, Cassell, London, 1916, p. 66. This view of war as cleansing and revitalising for the race was not

uncommon among Australia's patriotic elites. The Melbourne academic Archibald Strong expressed something similar in his serialised essays for the Melbourne *Herald* in 1914 and 1915: the crisis, he argued, this 'quarrel of our race', had encouraged British people to set aside 'a lifeless philosophy begotten by indifference upon sentimentalism...which, till the present crisis startled us into our better selves, threatened to rot all manly thought and action out of our race.' Archibald T. Strong, *Australia and the War*, George Robertson & Co, Melbourne, 1915, pp. 22, 23, 52. Joseph Cook was similarly lyrical on this theme on the day his government decided to send the AIF to war, 3 August 1914. In his private diary he wrote: 'The good to come[,] moral tonic. Luxury, frivolity, & class selfishness will be less. A memory for our children, bitter and bracing for many.' Quoted in Newton, *Hell-Bent*, p. 245.

- 12 Gerhard Fischer, 'Immigration, Integration, Disintegration', in Julianne Schultz & Peter Cochrane (eds), *Griffith Review 48: Enduring Legacies*, 2015, pp. 30–44; see also Gerhard Fischer, *Enemy Aliens, Internment and the Home Front Experience 1914–1920*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1989, pp. 30–41.
- 13 'The Day'—*And After: War Speeches of the Rt. Hon. W. M. Hughes*, arranged by Keith Murdoch, Cassell, London, 1916, pp. 66, 27, 100, 63.
- 14 Meaney, *Australia and the World Crisis, 1914–1923*, pp. 144–45.
- 15 'Australia was not content, as Canada lately had been content, to accept a gentlemanly Japanese assurance on migration.' W. J. Hudson, *Billy Hughes in Paris: The Birth of Australian Diplomacy*, Nelson in association with Australian Institute of International Affairs, West Melbourne, 1978, p. 55.
- 16 Hughes to Pearce, 21 April 1916. Quoted in Fitzhardinge, *The Little Digger*, pp. 163–64. Months later Hughes reluctantly supported the secret Anglo–Japanese agreement of February 1917 which divided Germany's Pacific Island colonies, those north of the equator going to Japan and those south going to the British empire. *The Oxford Companion to Australian Military History*, 'Japanese Threat', p. 322.
- 17 Fitzhardinge, *The Little Digger*, p. 165. In an earlier essay on this subject, Fitzhardinge was more precise about Hughes chafing at the restraints of his own censorship law: 'he was furious when the arguments he could not publicly employ were turned against him by opponents.' See 'Australia, Japan and Great Britain, 1914–18', *Historical Studies*, vol. 14, no. 54, 1970, p. 258. McQueen's summary is apt: 'In Hughes' mind, conscription for overseas service became a racial necessity for the preservation of White Australia.' *Japan to the Rescue*, p. 28.
- 18 Hughes quoted in *Adelaide Register*, 7 August 1916. Quoted in Sissons, 'Attitudes to Japan and Defence, 1890–1923', vol. 2, p. 33. Sissons observed another sign of the mounting concern about Japan: 'Official uneasiness in connection with Japan may also be seen in the decision of the Defence Department in June 1916 to bring from overseas a lecturer in Japanese to provide an intensive course for a number of selected staff cadets with a view to employing them on special service. This, in the middle of the Great War, when staff trained officers were at a premium.' Sissons also notes that by 1918 E. L. Piesse, as director of military intelligence, was engaged almost exclusively on the study of Far Eastern questions. (Sissons, p. 80.)
- 19 It was ten years later when Piesse felt free to reveal what he knew of that meeting. See E. L. Piesse, 'Japan and Australia,' *Foreign Affairs* (New York), IV, 1926, p. 482. Quoted in Fitzhardinge, *The Little Digger*, p. 167.
- 20 Hughes's party was against him and it controlled the Senate, so he was unable to introduce conscription by an act of parliament. Consequently, he plumped for a referendum and the caucus voted narrowly in favour.
- 21 'Advocates of Brute Force Whine for Freedom,' Henry E. Boote in *Australian Worker*, 26 October 1916, p. 14. According to Boote, Hughes had 'come back from his consultations with

British plutocrats and peers, with a scheme to rivet the shackles of military despotism on the limbs of the Australian workers’.

- 22 George Wise in *CPD*, 20 September 1916, p. 8713. Further along he noted: ‘Our safety depends upon concluding this war with the British Navy intact, and with our powers as a nation unimpaired. Otherwise how can we expect to be able to resist the coloured races if they should rise?’
- 23 See David Olusoga, *The World’s War*, Head of Zeus, London, 2014. Also, Pankaj Mishra, ‘The Great War: A View from Asia’, Flemish Peace Institute Lecture, 11 November 2017. Mishra reports: ‘altogether over four million non-white men were mobilized into the European and American armies, and fighting took place in places very remote from Europe.’
- 24 Maloney in *CPD*, 14 September 1916, p. 8593.
- 25 Mullan in *CPD*, 21 September 1916, p. 8806.
- 26 Marion Piddington (‘Lois’), ‘Via Nuova; or Science and Maternity’, 1916.
- 27 ‘School for Mother’s Institute: Its Aims and Objects’, Adelaide, 1916. Quoted in Jane Carey, ‘White Anxieties and the Articulation of Race: The Women’s Movement and the Making of White Australia, 1910–1930s’, in Carey & McLisky (eds), *Creating White Australia*, p. 206.
- 28 Catts in *CPD*, 20 September 1916, pp. 8703, 8698. For the statement outside the parliament see *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 October 1916.
- 29 Ross McKibbin, ‘Conscription in the First World War: Britain and Australia’, in Archer et al., *The Conscription Conflict and the Great War*, pp. 182–83. From the outset this argument was pushed hard. When the referendum bill was first presented to the parliament, the Labor MP Frank Anstey moved that it be called the ‘Coloured Labour Referendum’ instead of the Military Service Referendum.
- 30 Barry York, *Empire and Race: The Maltese in Australia, 1881–1949*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 1990, chs 4, 5. See also Frank Bongiorno, ‘Anti-Conscriptionism in Australia: Individuals, Organisations and Arguments’, in Archer et al., *The Conscription Conflict and the Great War*, pp. 86–88. The Maltese on the second ship were tested by a Dutch professor who went on board at a small port outside of Melbourne, and all 214 of them were rendered prohibited immigrants under the Immigration Restriction Act because they could not speak Dutch. Thus, the lawful precondition for their exclusion was fulfilled, and Billy Hughes kept his promise.
- 31 *Australian Worker*, 19 October 1916, p. 24.
- 32 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 October 1916.
- 33 Munro Ferguson to Lord Stamfordham, 10 November 1916, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/251–4.
- 34 Hughes to Bonar Law, 6 November 1916. Quoted in Fitzhardinge, *The Little Digger*, p. 217.
- 35 Hughes to Keith Murdoch, 4 November 1916. Quoted in Fitzhardinge, *The Little Digger*, p. 214. The governor-general recognised the heroic dimension in Hughes. ‘I always feel that in courage, genius and energy he stands alone,’ he wrote. He referred to Hughes, affectionately, as ‘my little man’. R. M. Ferguson to W. Long, 25 June 1917. Quoted in Fitzhardinge, *The Little Digger*, p. 269.
- 36 Statement in Deakin’s name, *Argus*, 19 December 1917. Brett suggests it was written by Deakin’s son-in-law, Herbert Brookes, a fierce advocate of conscription. See *The Enigmatic Mr Deakin*, pp. 422–23.
- 37 ‘She herself’ quoted in McKibbin, ‘Conscription in the First World War: Britain and Australia’, in Archer et al., *The Conscription Conflict and the Great War*, pp. 182–83.
- 38 *Labor Call*, 6 April 1917. This commentary does at least point to how both sides in this war were using colonial labour, including ‘coloured labour’, from the colonies in Africa and Asia.
- 39 For example, *Barrier Miner*, 26 November 1917, p. 2.

- 40 Meaney, *Australia and the World Crisis, 1914–1923*, p. 221.
- 41 Frank Bongiorno, 'Anti-Conscriptionism in Australia', in Archer et al., *The Conscription Conflict and the Great War*, p. 86.
- 42 Hughes to Murdoch, 3 September 1917. Quoted in Fitzhardinge, *The Little Digger*, p. 277.
- 43 Murdoch to Birdwood, 27 December 1917. AWM 3DRL/3376 5/1.
- 44 Hughes to Murdoch, 31 January 1918. Quoted in Fitzhardinge, *The Little Digger*, p. 306. Hughes's fury was soon after visited directly on J. H. Catts, an extraordinary case of the invasion of Parliament House by a military officer acting under the War Precautions Act, in order to seize a publication containing several speeches by the offending member. Five thousand copies of this pamphlet were seized. The content included a speech by Catts, in the parliament, on 15 January 1918. On that occasion, he was addressing a motion of no confidence in the prime minister and was vigorous in his denunciation. He also declared that Japan 'is only nominally and officially pro-Ally, but root and stock, throughout every phase of its political life, is absolutely pro-German'. The comment was cause for minor uproar. One member called it 'treason'. Soon after, when warned of the pamphlets, Senator Pearce as defence minister directed the military to act and the 'invasion' of parliament followed. The contents were considered 'detrimental to the safety of the Commonwealth'. A military officer with a warrant signed by General Williams, state military commandant for Victoria, attended on the parliament accompanied by a detective and took the pamphlets away in a motorcar. The controversy is all the more extraordinary for, as Fitzhardinge noted, Hughes's views about Japan were not dissimilar to those of Catts. But the prime minister also believed that the present position was so precarious 'that an insult to Japan might send her over to the other side and so utterly destroy us'. Hughes to Ferguson, 3 December 1917. Quoted in Fitzhardinge, *The Little Digger*, p. 298. For the relevant Hansard pages see *CPD*, 15 January 1918, pp. 2963–73; *CPD*, 5 April 1918, pp. 3647–61; and *CPD*, 25 April 1918, pp. 4184–88 for evidence of government anxieties, in 1918, about Australia's potentially perilous situation once the war was over. The entire event might perhaps be put down to Hughes's emotional wound from the loss of the second referendum.
- 45 Just when Hughes began to understand this equation is impossible to say, but it does make his bold 'every man we could rake up' assertion of January 1915 all the more curious, as it was made long before the recruitment crisis: Hughes to Fisher, 16 January 1915. As John Hirst pointed out: 'It was Hughes more than his opponents, who calculated most finely what Australia's contribution to the empire had to be.' Hirst, 'Australian Defence and Conscription: A Re-assessment', *Australian Historical Studies*, 25:101, 1993, p. 625.
- 46 Humphrey McQueen, *Gallipoli to Petrov: Arguing with Australian History*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1984, p. 136.
- 47 Hughes quoted in Carl Bridge, *William Hughes: Australia*, Haus Publishing, London, 2011, p. 55.
- 48 For a vivid insider's account of Hughes's attack on the problem of metals supply to Britain and the establishment of an empire zinc industry purged of all German influence, see W. S. Robinson, *If I Remember Rightly*, Cheshire, Melbourne, 1967, pp. 91–102.
- 49 Cable, Hughes to Watt, 23 October 1918. Quoted in Fitzhardinge, *The Little Digger*, p. 346.
- 50 *The Times*, 30 October 1918. Hughes to A. J. Balfour, 11 September 1918; also, Hughes to D. Lloyd George, 4 November 1918. Quoted in Fitzhardinge, *The Little Digger*, pp. 347–51. Hughes had accepted the equator as a 'line of demarkation' in 1916. Reopening the question of the islands north of the equator was probably a pivot to strengthen his bargaining position and his fierce case for British acquisition of the island 'ramparts' south of the equator, for Hughes was ever the master of overreaction for political effect. Sissons argues it was a case of Hughes's steadily mounting anxieties as the war and its diplomatic accompaniments ground on. Sissons, 'Attitudes to Japan and Defence, 1890–1923', pp. 86–88.

- 51 Cable, Hughes to Watt, 6 November 1918. Quoted in Fitzhardinge, *The Little Digger*, pp. 354–55.
- 52 Hughes quoted in Bridge, *William Hughes*, pp. 66–67.
- 53 W. J. Hudson, *Billy Hughes in Paris*, p. 10.
- 54 Hughes responded to the Fourteen Points in early November 1918. He quoted his response at length in his ‘Treaty of Peace’ speech to the Commonwealth parliament upon his return to Australia. See *CPD*, 10 September 1919, p. 12168. Hudson observes that Wilson’s internationalism was also coloured by national self-interest: ‘Hughes’ approach was, as usual, nationalist but so, of course, was Wilson’s—free trade and the “open-door” happened to suit the United States economy.’ It suited American imperial ambition abroad, in both Europe and the colonised world. See Hudson, *Billy Hughes in Paris*, p. 47.
- 55 Shorthand Notes of a Meeting of the Imperial War Cabinet, 26 November 1918, in Hughes Papers, Series 23, Ms. 1538. Quoted in Hudson, *Billy Hughes in Paris*, p. 48.

Chapter 10: Versailles

- 1 For ‘men of all colours...’ see Hughes in *CPD*, 10 September 1919, p. 12169. For Hughes and Clemenceau see Hughes quoted in Bridge, *William Hughes*, p. 78.
- 2 Hughes quoted in Bridge, *William Hughes*, p. 80. See also Hudson, *Billy Hughes in Paris*, p. 20. The Australian delegation was at first opposed to the mandate system, fearing it would permit Japanese immigration, but once that matter was clarified the Australians were reconciled. ‘Until a very late stage in the discussions it was assumed that any mandate system would require the administering authority to admit the commerce and nationals of League members. When the right of the mandatory power to restrict immigration was conceded, Australia accepted the system.’ Sissons, ‘Attitudes to Japan and Defence, 1890–1923’, pp. 90, 91. It was the Australian John Latham, with the help of the British Empire Delegation, who drafted the famous clause providing for the ‘C’ Mandate which was accepted by Hughes at the conference.
- 3 Hughes quoted in Stuart Ward, ‘Security: Defending Australia’s Empire’, p. 246.
- 4 Quoted in Lake & Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, p. 286. Of all the Australian studies that traverse this subject, few have attempted a balance of perspectives from either side of the ‘colour line’. *Drawing* is one of the few. For a brief summary of Wilson’s racist attitudes and policies while president of the United States, see William Keylor, ‘The Long-Forgotten Racial Attitudes and Policies of Woodrow Wilson’, *Professor Voices*, 4 March 2013: bu.edu/professorvoices/2013/03/04/the-long-forgotten-racial-attitudes-and-policies-of-woodrow-wilson
- 5 Lake & Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, p. 289. Baron Makino’s words on behalf of the Japanese delegation were carefully chosen: he noted the issue was ‘very delicate and complicated’. He conceded that immediate realisation of the ideal was not proposed, and that enactment in practise must be left in the hands of responsible leaders who would have the state of public opinion to consider. He also noted that under the covenant members of the league would be bound to come to the assistance of any other member nation that was attacked, thus ‘each nation would like to feel and in fact demand, that he should be placed on an equal footing with people he undertakes to defend even with his life.’ Quoted in Sissons, ‘Attitudes to Japan and Defence, 1890–1923’, vol. 2, p. 38. The British gave the obvious reply: either the points proposed by the Japanese were ‘vague and ineffective or else they were of practical significance. In the latter case, they opened the door to serious controversy and to interference in the domestic affairs of State members of the League.’ (Sissons, p. 92.)
- 6 A. J. Balfour, British foreign secretary, 1916–19. Quoted in Lake & Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, pp. 292–93.

- 7 Wilson had wanted to keep America out of the war 'to keep the white race strong in order to meet the yellow race'. The need to defeat Germany eventually overrode his racial priorities but he carried his anxieties about the yellow race, and the voters at home, through the last years of the war and on to the Versailles Peace Conference. See Walker, *Anxious Nation*, p. 168.
- 8 Hughes quoted in Hudson, *Billy Hughes in Paris*, p. 70.
- 9 Lake & Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, pp. 293–94.
- 10 Latham quoted in Hudson, *Billy Hughes in Paris*, p. 55. He was another veteran Japan-watcher. As far back as 1908 he had found himself in lockstep with Deakin on the threat of Japan and the dire need for an Australian navy. Although very much inclined to write as a diplomat and strategic thinker, he was, at times, inclined to the kind of invasion fantasy that periodically flourished in Australia. See Walker, 'Rising Suns', in Walker & Sobocinska (eds), *Australia's Asia*, pp. 85–87.
- 11 Hudson, *Billy Hughes in Paris*, p. 56.
- 12 The amended clause was as follows: 'Equality of nations being a basic principle of the League of Nations, the High Contracting Parties agree to endorse the principle of equal and just treatment to be accorded to all alien nationals of State members of the League.'
- 13 Lake & Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, pp. 297–99.
- 14 A young British conference participant, Harold Nicolson, wrote of Wilson's good fortune in avoiding the political troubles the clause would have brought him at home: 'The President had, by the skin of his teeth, been rescued by Mr. Hughes.' Quoted in Hudson, *Billy Hughes in Paris*, p. 58.
- 15 For a summary account of the national shame and disillusionment in the non-European world after the racial-equality vote was declared lost, see Lake & Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, pp. 303–09.
- 16 His journey and the crowds at Fremantle, Perth, Kalgoorlie and Port Augusta (at 4 a.m.); at Adelaide and Melbourne; and later at Sydney and Brisbane are briefly described in Fitzhardinge, *The Little Digger*, pp. 420–21.
- 17 CPD, 10 September 1919, pp. 12163–79. Fitzhardinge's exceptionally brief account of this speech ignores or evades almost the entirety of its content and significance. *The Little Digger*, pp. 423–24. See p. 417 for the 'Mt. Everest' note.

Chapter 11: The Politics of Popular Memory, or, The Art of National Forgetting

- 1 Bean, *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918. Volume 1*, p. xxviii.
- 2 Bean, *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918. Volume 1*, pp. 4–5.
- 3 Bean, *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918. Volume 1*, p. 15.
- 4 Bean, *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918. Volume 1*, p. 9.
- 5 Bean, *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918. Volume 1*, p. 11.
- 6 Hughes may have said it publicly—'I bid you go and fight for White Australia in France'—but Bean was not about to elaborate a proposition so contrary to the official position and its diplomatic requirements.
- 7 Bean, *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918. Volume 1*, pp. 27–28. As Newton argues, Bean's formulation 'scarcely matches the evidence', as 'Australia did plan for expeditionary warfare, and for colonial conquest [of certain Pacific islands], and she did so officially—it was all there in the Defence Scheme of 1913 and its supporting documents.' See *Hell-Bent*, pp. 40–50.

- 8 Ken Inglis, 'Introduction to UQP Edition', in Bean, *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914–1918. Volume 1*, p. xxxv.
- 9 See Marilyn Lake, 'British World or New World? Anglo-Saxonism and Australian engagement with America', *History Australia*, vol. 10, no. 3, December 2013.
- 10 Sissons' thesis is sometimes described as a three-volume study, which is not accurate. Volume one consists of the text; volume two, the footnotes; and volume three, appended documents. The presentation of the thesis is rather messy but that cannot diminish the scholarly achievement.
- 11 Calwell quoted in Humphrey McQueen, *Japan to the Rescue*, p. 264. As late as 1991, McQueen would write: 'If, unlike some of my friends, I do not accept Hiroshima as just exchange for Changi, I cannot escape the impression made on me by Vivian Bullwinkel's first-hand account of Australian nurses being machine-gunned in the surf.' *Japan to the Rescue*, p. 269. On the other hand, Peter Stanley notes how the war against the Japanese in Asia also forged a new and positive relationship between Australians and Asians. *Invading Australia*, p. 242 (digital copy).
- 12 The transformation in Bean's views on race was first discussed in a public forum by Stephen Ellis in 'Racism in Australia—A Contribution to the Debate', *Australian Quarterly*, September 1972. For the collapse of faith in race thinking, see Lake & Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, pp. 350–56; also, Cannadine, *The Undivided Past*, pp. 203–18. The full title of the statement was 'The UNESCO Statement by Experts on Race Problems'. The statement discredited the connection between cultural traits and biological characteristics, and recommended the term 'race' be eschewed. Race was described as a social myth that had 'created an enormous amount of damage, taking a heavy toll in human lives causing intolerable suffering'.
- 13 *War Aims of a Plain Australian*, Sydney, 1943, p. 159. Bean thought the achievements of the Chinese resistance under Chiang Kai-shek also affirmed the wrongness of ideas of white superiority. Racism was seen to be a dangerous liability in the battle against communism in Asia, as much a strategic necessity as a matter of conviction.
- 14 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 January 1953; quoted in Rees, *Bearing Witness*, p. xvi. (Emphasis added). See Rees, *Bearing Witness*, p. 475. It is unfortunate that Bean did not get the chance, at this stage of his life, to further explore the 'Aboriginal question.' His early writings, as Rees notes, indicate a progressiveness on this question that was not common at the time. See *Bearing Witness*, pp. 477–78. As with Bernard O'Dowd, Bean's racial thinking was rather paradoxical, progressive in parts but unable, otherwise, to escape the assumption of white superiority.
- 15 David Walker, 'Studying the Neighbours: The Asian Collection', in Peter Cochrane (ed.), *Remarkable Occurrences: The National Library of Australia's First 100 Years*, National Library of Australia, 2001, pp. 163–82. It was no accident that Manning Clark's first volume of his vast *History of Australia* (1962) shocked everyone by emphasising the colony's place in Asia ahead of our European origins. Clark, at the ANU, was in the midst of the ferment.
- 16 For the emergence of a 'Pacific awareness' in Australia between the two world wars, see David Walker's chapter on 'Pacific Citizens' in his *Anxious Nation*, pp. 210–26. See also Stephen Roberts, 'History of Contacts between the Orient and Australia', in I. Clunies Ross (ed.), *Australia and the Far East: Diplomatic and Trade Relations*, Angus & Robertson in conjunction with the Australian Institute of International Affairs (New South Wales Branch), Sydney, 1936.
- 17 William Macmahon Ball, *Japan: Enemy or Ally* (1948); *Nationalism and Communism in East Asia* (1952). For a biographical sketch, see Peter Ryan, *William Macmahon Ball: A Memoir*, Melbourne University Press, 1990.
- 18 Arthur Stockwin & Keiko Tamura (eds), *Bridging Australia and Japan. Volume 1: The Writings of David Sissons, Historian and Political Scientist*, ANU Press, Canberra, 2016, p. 3.
- 19 Neville Meaney, Laurie Fitzhardinge and David Walker acknowledged Sissons' contribution. Meaney noted: 'all students undertaking research in this field owe a considerable debt to his

pioneering work.' *The Search for Security in the Pacific, 1901–14*, p. ix. Sissons' papers are held by the National Library of Australia at MS 3092.

- 20 John La Nauze, Humphrey McQueen, Neville Meaney, Laurie Fitzhardinge, W. J. Hudson, David Walker, John Mordike, Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, Douglas Newton, Tom D. C. Roberts, and Peter Rees. Also, the essays of Greg Lockhart in *Griffith Review* 32 and in Walker & Sobocinska (eds), *Australia's Asia*; and Stuart Ward's essay in *Australia's Empire*, cited in chapter two. Manning Clark's influence at the ANU is a part of the historiographical story, but that thread is beyond the scope of this book.
- 21 Paul Kelly, 'Anzac Day: How Villers-Bretonneux Cemented Our Identity', *Australian*, 21 April 2018, p. 16.
- 22 Humphrey McQueen, 'Taught to Forget'. Unpublished essay in author's possession.
- 23 Prime Minister Tony Abbott, Speech at the Dawn Service at Gallipoli, 25 April 2015 (emphasis added).
- 24 Peter Cochrane, 'The Past Is Not Sacred: A Dangerous Obsession with Anzac', in Schultz & Cochrane (eds), *Griffith Review* 48, pp. 13–24. Republished in John Watson (ed.), *Politics, Policy and the Chance of Change: The Conversation Year Book 2015*, Melbourne University Press, 2015, pp. 238–51.
- 25 Ben Macintyre, 'What's the Turkish for Genocide?', *The Times*, 18 June 2005. See also Margaret Macmillan, *The Uses and Abuses of History*, Profile Books, London 2009, ch. 7.
- 26 Inga Clendinnen writes of the 'warriors', the 'scalp collectors' who hunt the historians they have marked as the enemy. See 'Dispatches from the History Wars' in *Agamemnon's Kiss: Selected Essays* (Text Publishing, Melbourne, 2006), pp. 154–55.
- 27 Robert Manne has commented on the unpredicted surge of interest among young Australians drawn to Gallipoli and Anzac Day in recent times: 'My guess is that they are attracted by the need to feel they belong to something larger than themselves and, living as they do in a hedonistic age, by astonishment at the sacrifices young men in a different time were willing to make.' See 'The War Myth that Made Us', *Age*, 25 April 2007.
- 28 David Olusoga, *The World's War*, pp. 15, 40. Olusoga's reference to the prose and poetry of 'a few dozen officers' is perhaps an all too abbreviated reference to the 'literary war', the contribution of novelists and poets, that over the course of the twentieth century influenced popular memory in ways that historical tomes could never achieve. Olusoga calls it a 'process whereby history is overshadowed by literature'. He notes how 'the literary war focuses on lost generations, the follies of a callous establishment and the sheer pity of it all'.
- 29 'Race is also largely written out of the celebratory tale of filial loyalty told by these historians; the pursuit of the national interest in their view is about sovereignty and security, the defence of "Australia" but not "White Australia". Britishness is understood as a cultural but not a racial phenomenon.' From Frank Bongiorno & Grant Mansfield, 'Whose War Was It Anyway? Some Australian Historians and the Great War', *History Compass*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2008, p. 80.
- 30 Cable, Hughes to Fisher, 16 January 1915. Quoted in Meaney, *Australia and the World Crisis, 1914–1923*, p. 40. And CPD, 10 September 1919, p. 12175.

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Acknowledgments

The concept for this book took shape following a conference in Shanghai, late in 2015. The conference was called ‘Contested Histories and the Politics of Memory’. It was the third conference in a series organised by the Foundation for Australian Studies in China (FASIC), convened by Professor David Walker, who was the BHP Billiton Chair of Australian Studies at Beijing University at the time.

In preparation for the conference I had returned to the literature that, in due course, I would tag the ‘core historiography’. While these books were hardly uniform in purpose, they had collectively recovered the history of abandonment anxiety and race fear that so profoundly shaped Australian defence policy from the 1880s to the Paris Peace Conference of 1919.

The concept behind *Best We Forget* was simple enough. I could see the need for a concise volume that could act as a conduit between the general reader and a hefty body of scholarship that was unknown beyond a small number of independent scholars and academic specialists. With that object in mind I embarked on a short history based on these vital works, along with my own findings in various places, most notably the record of the *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, and a final chapter on the subject of popular memory and national forgetting.

I must thank numerous scholars and friends who have helped me with points of detail, critical commentary and encouragement as the drafts for this book took shape. Thanks to Geoff Cains, Jane Carey, Mary Cunnane, Greg Lockhart, Ken Olah, Ros Pesman, Tom D. C. Roberts, Ipsita Sengupta, David Walker, Stuart Ward, Julie Wark and Barry York. At the National Library, Margy Burn, Michael Herlihy and Andrew Sergeant were also most helpful.

I am particularly grateful to a number of scholars for taking the time to read the entire manuscript at various stages and provide me with valuable

commentary and, in some cases, sharp criticism. Thanks to Frank Bongiorno, Judith Brett, Lesley Johnson, Humphrey McQueen, Douglas Newton, Peter Rees, Peter Stanley and Richard White.

I have dedicated this book to my dear friend the late John Hirst. So many of us miss him. John and I exchanged numerous emails on the subject of this book. I should mention one of these exchanges, for it relates to my purpose here—to alert readers to the racial dimension of Australia’s participation in the First World War; to address the question of what gets remembered and what gets forgotten, and why. John was strongly of the view that national myths hold up despite the historians. On 17 September 2015, he wrote: ‘My own view is that history will never beat myth.’ He may well be right, but the final chapter here is a little more hopeful and, anyway, the historian’s job is to keep at it, as John always did.

In bringing this book to publication, Text Publishing has been a tremendous partner, and I must thank my editor, David Winter, for his enthusiasm for the manuscript in first-draft form, for his astute advice thereafter and for the convivial spirit throughout. Thanks, too, to our discerning proofreader, Emma Schwarcz.

Finally, I wish to thank my partner, Suzanne Rickard, who read the drafts and gave me the benefit of her expertise. I am, as ever, very grateful for her counsel, her constant support and encouragement.

What faults remain in this text are, of course, entirely mine.

Peter Cochrane's writing about war includes the award-winning *Simpson and the Donkey: The Making of a Legend*; the companion volume to the ABC TV series *Australians at War*; and two studies of wartime photography, *The Western Front, 1916–18* and *Tobruk 1941*. His books in other fields of history include *Colonial Ambition: Foundations of Australian Democracy*, which won the Age Book of the Year award and the Prime Minister's Prize for Australian History. He is also the author of two works of fiction: the novella *Governor Bligh and the Short Man* and the recently published novel *The Making of Martin Sparrow*.

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Published by The Text Publishing Company, 2018.

Cover image from the National Library of Australia: 'Prime Minister W. M. Hughes in London, wearing an Australian Army hat', newspaper clipping, c. 1919.

Book design by Imogen Stubbs.

Typeset by J&M Typesetting.

ISBN: 9781925603750 (paperback)

ISBN: 9781925626735 (ebook)

A catalogue record for this book is available from the National Library of Australia.



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